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BY

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TO

MY WIFE

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INTRODUCTION

From reviews that I have read of earlier books of mine I have at last learnt wisdom. It seems that I must be explicit about my intentions in a preface in order to save the critics the trouble of reading the book through.

Now it must be remembered that literary critics are men of intelligence who have read everything and damned most things. Very few indeed are the books which they allow to be worth the trouble that must have been taken to write them.

And it is certainly true that we suffer from a flood of reading matter which serves no more purpose than a packet of the cheapest cigarettes or a cocktail.

We have not troubled to acquire a critical sense. We accept what we see on the bookstalls and buy books almost entirely from the attractiveness of their wrappers. But there ought to be a mean between a ferocious disdain of all modern writing and a surfeiting on all that is published. The majority of men and women are very much like myself, I imagine. They read with equal interest a modern novel, say, of Sheila Kaye-Smith, an exposition of the Relativity Theory like Eddington's *Space, Time and Gravitation*, E. V. Lucas's essays, Henri Fabre and Trotter, and at the same time keep harking back to reread *Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy*, Shelley and other favourites among the classics.

Even so, they are apt to miss much that is readable . . . and from my correspondence I gather that I have many times been lucky enough to introduce an author to a new reader, as a result of which an undying friendship between the two has been caused.

Merely to turn over the following pages will not give the critic any clue why I chose the writers and books that I have chosen.

In point of fact, it just happens that these are the people who have attracted me sufficiently in my reading during the last year to jot down not so much why

I found them attractive as what I found attractive in them.

It is quite by chance that there should be almost an equal number of foreigners, contemporaries and native classics in my list. I suppose it means that I devote about one-third of my reading hours to each.

With regard to my method of approach, it is no good reviling me for not criticising each book or author according to a stereotyped plan, as if I were a chemist analysing a compound. I am not analysing so much as enjoying. My position is that of the not altogether successful cricketer who yet takes a keen delight in watching great players bat. I do not propose to sit down and lay emphasis on the chances given or the faulty strokes: my object is rather to take as many enthusiasts of the game with me as I can find and just lie down and watch an innings which I know to be a good one.

To call this "gush" or "gusto," as some of my reviewers do, is merely silly. I am not so mentally deficient as they would have people to believe.

Merely to "slobber" over a book or a person is not one of my characteristics. It is extremely easy to pick holes, to adopt a negative attitude, to call down fire from heaven and make a show with the fists when your enemy is merely an author. That is not my idea of honourable action. If a book is bad (and I agree that most books are), let it die by itself. Professional critics only too frequently remind me of vultures: they crowd round the weak and the dying ready to devour.

The object of any man who enjoys life is to share his enjoyment with others. If a book appeals to me I want as many people as possible to derive the pleasure that I derived from it.

I would have my critics remember that this is not a book on "Why we should *not* Read ——" (which would have been very easy to write), and therefore is meant to be laudatory. I do demand sincerity in my authors and at any rate a feeling for beauty. . . . Knowing full well as a novelist myself how extremely hard these desiderata are to be obtained, I am perhaps more lenient than some critics who have never tackled a creative task, just as I am less inclined to decry another man's strokes at cricket

when I think of my own feeble efforts, but it is very definitely worth pointing out that the severest critics of any sport are always those who know nothing about it, and I am beginning to believe that these modern critics who find no good in any work which comes under their notice know nothing whatever about literature, but, like the audiences at a Cup-tie, talk a wonderful jargon which is apt to deceive all but the elect.

I feel that I have wasted too much time on the critics. They don't really count for anything on either side.

To you for whom I have written this book there is perhaps just this to say. Don't begin by looking for fresh light on authors that you already know. My sole object is to introduce you to authors that you don't yet know. This introduction was not written for you. You can leave it out. The introduction was written for the critics, the book for you, and the proportion of pages devoted to them set against the pages devoted to you will give you an accurate idea of the proportion of favour that I want, yours and the critics'.

Five of the shortest chapters in this book have been already published, one in *To-Day*, the others in *John o' London's Weekly*; to the editors of these journals I am indebted for permission to reprint.

PART I

SOME ENGLISH CLASSICS

I

TOM JONES

I SUPPOSE there is still somebody living who has not read *Tom Jones*: it seems inconceivable that it should be so, but queer things of this sort do happen. Only the other day I met a man who had never seen any Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera. To say that Fielding possessed more wit and humour and more knowledge of mankind than any other person of modern times, except Shakespeare, ought to be sufficient to drive anyone ignorant of his work at once to the nearest bookshop. "Since the days of Homer," says one great critic, "the world has not seen a more artful fable [than *Tom Jones*]. The characters and adventures are wonderfully diversified; yet the circumstances are all so natural, and rise se easily from one another, and co-operate with so much regularity in bringing on, even while they seem to retard, the catastrophe, that the curiosity of the reader is kept always awake, and instead of flagging, grows more and more impatient as the story advances, till at last it becomes downright anxiety. And when we get to the end, and look back on the whole contrivance, we are amazed to find that of so many incidents there should be so few superfluous; that in such variety of fiction there should be so great probability, and that so complete a tale should be so perspicuously conducted and with perfect unity of design."

We read and reread *Tom Jones* in order to recapture some of that first careless rapture which is so refreshing a point in Fielding's fiction, to get away from the weary, meticulous self-analysis of the modern novelist, to the full-blooded, honest attitude of the country-bred Englishman of the eighteenth century. Here we have a tale told for the sake of narrative, with incidents, the interest in which never for a moment flags, characters all lively, true and fresh, dialogue full of point, variety and suitability. It is a test of our interest that we feel angry at the constant

digressions and interruptions, but who would do without those masterly initial chapters in each book ?

As to the charge of coarseness which has been brought against him, we feel that Fielding would have been dumbfounded with surprise. He states explicitly, over and over again, that to recommend goodness and innocence was always his sincere endeavour, and certainly no higher-souled, purer heroine than Sophia Western ever walked. Even Tom Jones himself, who was singularly unable to resist the importunity of frail ladies, acts up to a code which is certainly not coarse.

"I do not pretend to the gift of chastity more than my neighbours," he says to Nightingale. "I have been guilty with women, I own it, but am not conscious that I ever injured any. Nor would I, to procure pleasure to myself, be knowingly the cause of misery to any human being."

Allworthy, as his name suggests, is a model of what we should all like to be, generous, pure, slow to believe evil, quick to forgive, a true friend and a merciful judge.

"It hath been my constant maxim in life," he says to Blifil when he hears of his sister's marriage, "to make the best of all matters that happen."

Not that Fielding makes his characters impossibly good : there is none that avoids some taint. Allworthy is altogether too credulous, and Sophia's allegiance to her family passes the bounds of common sense, while the rest of the characters have very much of the earthy in their texture. The lovable Partridge is a coward, his wife a shrew, Allworthy's sister and her husband hate each other like poison, Square and Thwackum are eaten up with hypocrisy and deceit, young Blifil is an unredeemed villain, Squire Western is an ignorant, blasphemous boor, and his sister would be a thorn in any man's flesh. Square, with his eternal harping on the natural beauty of virtue, and Thwackum, with his chatter about the divine power of grace, are a pretty couple of scoundrels for Fielding to lavish his irony on.

"Had not Thwackum too much neglected virtue, and Square religion, in the composition of their several systems, and had not both utterly discarded all natural goodness of

heart, they had never been represented as the objects of derision in this history," says the author.

But perhaps Fielding's greatest charm lies in his firm, masculine, straightforward, even racy English. We may take as an example what the ordinary author finds most difficult, the description of his heroine.

"Her shape was not only exact, but extremely delicate; and the nice proportion of her arms promised the truest symmetry in her limbs. Her hair, which was black, was so luxuriant that it reached her middle, before she cut it to comply with the modern fashion, and it was now curled so gracefully in her neck that few could believe it to be her own. . . . Her eyebrows were full, even, and arched beyond the power of art to imitate. Her black eyes had a lustre in them which all her softness could not extinguish. Her nose was exactly regular, and her mouth, in which were two rows of ivory, exactly answered Sir John Suckling's description in those lines:

'Her lips were red, and one was thin,
Compared to that was next her chin.
Some bee had stung it newly.'

Her cheeks were of the oval kind, and in her right she had a dimple, which the least smile discovered."

Such is the girl who fell in love with Tom Jones in her teens and who after an amazing series of misfortunes ultimately married him, in spite of her knowledge of his many temporary intrigues with other women. Indeed, if she followed after her father, she would have "liked him the better for it."

"You have not the worse opinion of a young fellow," bellows the Squire to Sophia, "for getting a bastard, have you, girl? No, no, the women will like un the better for't."

Certainly Sophia did not seem to like Tom the worse for his amatory adventure with Molly Seagrim, perhaps because she, like her creator, was able to differentiate between real love and that "desire of satisfying a voracious appetite with a certain quantity of delicate white human flesh" which passes for love.

In other words, Fielding has made her human.

"We . . . are admitted behind the scenes of this great theatre of nature," he proudly says in one of his prefaces "(and no author ought to write anything besides dictionaries and spelling-books who hath not this privilege). . . ." He is certainly admitted behind the scenes of the country squire's household.

Sophia's aunt, with her political and philosophical analogies ("You are to consider me, child, as Socrates, not asking your opinion, but only informing you of mine"; and again, "The French shall as soon persuade me that they take foreign towns in defence only of their own country as you can impose on me to believe you have never yet thought seriously of matrimony . . ."); Sophia's father's relations with his wife ("His conversation consisted chiefly of halloaing, singing, relations of sporting adventures, bawdy, and abuse of women and of the Government: these, however, were the only seasons when Mr Western saw his wife, for when he repaired to her bed he was generally so drunk that he could not see; and, in the sporting season, he always rose from her before it was light") and his attitude to her after she died ("When anything in the least soured him, as a bad scenting day, or a distemper among his hounds, or any other such misfortune, he constantly vented his spleen by invectives against the deceased, saying, 'If my wife was alive now, she would be glad of this.'")—all these pictures are lightning strokes of verisimilitude which prove how perfectly at home Fielding was in the great theatre of nature.

When we come to the lower classes, to Mrs Honour, with her "Marry, come up!" "Hoity toity!" prefaces to gossip, which is only rivalled and not excelled by her counterpart in Shakespeare, Juliet's nurse; to Partridge, with his pricelessly irrelevant tags from the classics: "infandum, regina, jubes renovare dolorem," "hinc illæ lachrymæ," "tempus edax rerum," and so on, we can only give ourselves up whole-heartedly to the enjoyment of them and wish that they may go on talking for ever.

Then there is the surgeon whose talk might well be set for dictation in schools: "I was once, I remember, called to a patient who had received a violent contusion in his tibia, by which the exterior cutis was lacerated, so that

there was a profuse sanguinary discharge; and the interior membranes were so divellicated that the os or bone very plainly appeared through the aperture of the vulnus or wound. Some febrile symptoms intervening at the same time (for the pulse was exuberant, and indicated much phlebotomy), I apprehended an immediate mortification."

The fact is that Fielding, like the classical author he is so fond of quoting, finds every*thing* and particularly every*one* in the world amusing and interesting.

It was a stroke of genius to send Sophia and Tom wandering from inn to inn, for in no other way than by making his characters take to the open road could the author have introduced such a variety of characters or such exciting episodes.

"For though every good author will confine himself within the bounds of probability, it is by no means necessary that his characters, or his incidents, should be trite, common or vulgar; such as happen in every street, or in every house, or which may be met with in the home articles of a newspaper. Nor must he be inhibited from showing many persons and things, which may possibly have never fallen within the knowledge of great part of his readers."

In one point Fielding certainly does strain the bounds of probability beyond all bearing: there never was such a book for impossible coincidences as *Tom Jones*. Everybody appears to know everybody else and everybody else's business; people turn up in the most unexpected places (especially bedrooms) at the most unfortunate moments. It is like a musical comedy in this respect. There is much more of the surprising than there is of the credible in *events*, not in the *people*, who are, as I have said, only too natural.

It is not so much surprising that Partridge should read Erasmus, Ovid, Pope's *Homer*, *The Spectator*, *Robinson Crusoe* and Thomas à Kempis as that he should have ever met Tom Jones as he did and when he did.

It is not at all surprising that a barber should quote Latin tags irrelevantly, or that he should join Tom with the idea of fighting for the Jacobites, but not be "overnice" when he found out that he was "booked" for the other side (though he was going to fight against his own

cause, yet he would not drink against it); but it is impossible to believe that the same people should jump into and out of the story and meet again after a score of years or more.

There are readers who object to the interpolation of the episode of the Man of the Hill on the ground that it only retards the action. Such people ought not to read *Tom Jones*. The true reader is in no hurry to get on with the story, though he is thrilled with the intricacies of it; he is ready to turn aside into any by-path which will shed more light on the England of the eighteenth century. For after all it is from the Man of the Hill that we hear that "he could not only hit a standing mark with great certainty, but hath actually shot a crow as it was flying in the air"; that there were gentlemen farmers of three hundred pounds a year in 1657; that on five hundred pounds a year at Oxford a profligate could keep his horses and his whore and obtain what credit he pleased; that there were Justice Darlings even in those days ("I have travelled the circuit these forty years and never found a horse in my life . . . thou art a lucky fellow . . . for thou didst not only find a horse, but a halter too, I promise thee"); how to leave a restaurant without paying for one's food; how much more costly precious Burgundy used to be than simple claret; how philosophy elevates and steels the mind ("Men of true learning and almost universal knowledge always compassionate the ignorance of others; but fellows who excel in some little, low, contemptible art are always certain to despise those who are unacquainted with that art"); how the sane Englishman of the time regarded James II., and a thousand other things of equal interest.

And in spite of its apparent irrelevance, does not this episode develop our appreciation of the hero? Set against the misanthropic Man of the Hill, who sees marks of God's Power, Wisdom and Goodness everywhere but in his fellow-man, Tom Jones acts as an admirable foil.

"I have lived," he says, "but a short time in the world, and yet have known men worthy of the highest friendship, and women of the highest love."

It is by virtue of contrasts such as this just shown that Fielding would claim to be named among the geniuses.

"By genius I would understand that power, or rather

those powers of the mind which are capable of penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences. These are no other than invention and judgment. . . ."

Added to this there must be "conversation."

"So necessary is this to the understanding the characters of men that none are more ignorant of them than those learned pedants whose lives have been entirely consumed in colleges and among books; for however exquisitely human nature may have been described by writers, the true practical system can be learnt only in the world."

He also requires of his ideal author "refinement, elegance and liberality of spirit." He must have a good heart and be capable of feeling. "The author who will make me weep," says Horace, "must first weep himself. No man can paint a distress well which he doth not feel while he is painting it. . . . I am convinced I never make my reader laugh heartily but where I have laughed before him."

Who would deny the interest or importance of digressions like these when they shed such a flood of light on to the author's attitude to his own work?

The sergeant who resented the imputation against his character conveyed by the words *non sequitur* ("You are another," cries the sergeant, "an you come to that. No more a sequitur than yourself. You are a pack of rascals, and I'll prove it, for I will fight the best man of you all for twenty pounds"); the lightning-like flash of inspiration which made Mrs Waters repeat the cry, "Rape! Rape!" when she is discovered in bed with Tom; the logic of the landlady of the inn ("So easy and good-humoured were they that they found no fault with my Worcestershire perry, which I sold them for champagne; and it, to be sure, is as well tasted, and as wholesome, as the best champagne in the kingdom, otherwise I would scorn to give it 'em; and they drank me two bottles. No, no, I will never believe any harm of such sober, good sort of people")—all these touches and thousands more are proofs of how much genius depends upon "conversation," or a practical knowledge of the world, the power of distinguishing essential differences.

Fielding seems to have distinguished these essential differences not only in people but in the life of his time on every side. Realising full well that posterity would read him, he also realised what were the things that posterity would like to hear about it. So we get that inimitable description of the puppet show where "The Provoked Husband" displaced "Punch and Judy," by the throwing out of which "such idle trumpery puppet-shows were," in the words of their master, "at last brought to be a rational entertainment."

"I would by no means degrade the ingenuity of your profession," answered Jones, "but I should have been glad to have seen my old acquaintance Master Punch for all that; and so far from improving, I think, by leaving him out and his merry wife Joan, you have spoiled your puppet show"—a sentiment that many of us to-day will heartily endorse.

It is a rare treat to be shown a performance of *Hamlet* in the eighteenth century with Partridge as critic, preferring Claudius to the rest of the actors because he spoke louder, and objecting to the gravediggers because of their lack of skill. Then there is the gypsies' wedding in the barn, with its sumptuous food and its Solomon-like judgment delivered by the king on the cuckold: "Me do order dat you have no money given you, for you deserve punishment, not reward; me do order, therefore, dat you be de infamous gipsy, and do wear a pair of horns upon your forehead for one month; and dat your wife be called de whore, and pointed at all dat time; for you be de infamous gipsy, but she be no less de infamous whore."

Running through it all is the delicious Partridge, resenting not at all attacks upon his honour, but up in arms at once when Tom casts aspersions on his parts of speech. "A child may sometimes teach his grandmother to suck eggs. I have lived to a fine purpose, truly, if I am to be taught my grammar at this time of day."

Truly Fielding invoked the comic spirit to some purpose: "Come, thou, that hast inspired thy Aristophanes, thy Lucian, thy Cervantes, thy Rabelais, thy Molière, thy Shakespeare, thy Swift, thy Marivaux, fill my pages with humour; till mankind learn the good nature to laugh only at the follies of others, and the humility to grieve at their

own." The creator of Partridge is worthy to hold his own in the kingdom of humour with any of the octette.

No less successful is he when he leaves the broad highway and the rustic inns of the west for the fashionable life of the metropolis. The coquetry of Lady Bellaston and the gallantry of Lord Fellamar are as well portrayed as the poachers and squires of Somerset. Indeed with Hogarth on the one side and Fielding on the other as companions he must be extremely dull-witted who fails to get right behind the scenes of eighteenth-century England, when the devil was no longer believed in, and ladies of fashion curtsied low to their male friends, when nobody's manners were "over-nice," when a virtuous girl was almost as rare as a road safe from highwaymen, where "the highest life is much the dullest, and affords very little humour or entertainment" beyond "dressing and cards, eating and drinking, bowing and curtsying," where a country gentleman orders as a dinner for one at the Hercules' Pillars "a shoulder of mutton roasted, a spare rib of pork and a fowl and egg sauce," where the same country gentleman sends his daughter into the arms of her lover with a "Yoicks!" and a "Tally-ho!": "To her, boy! to her! Go to her! That's it, little honeys. O, that's it!" and a "Harkee, Allworthy, I'll bet thee five pounds to a crown we have a boy to-morrow nine months; but prithee tell me what wut ha'! Wut ha' Burgundy, champagne, or what? For, please Jupiter, we'll make a night on't."

We read *Tom Jones*, then, first and foremost because it is a "rattling good yarn" from start to finish, full of hair-breadth escapes, trials of, and misunderstandings between, hero and heroine, ending, after fickle Fortune has done everything in her power to prevent it, in the complete happiness of their union; we read it because in the course of our journey through it we make many new and life-long friends, find much to laugh at; tenderness and pity are roused in us for the unhappy, mirth at the discomfiture of the self-complacent hypocrites.

We read it in order to be transported to a healthier century than ours, when neurasthenia was unknown and people were tortured by nothing worse than colic and spleen; we read it to get away from people who think

too much and live not at all, to people who think not at all and live every moment of their lives to the full, sinning, if they sin, splendidly, like the pagans they were.

We read it because it was written by a man of genius possessed of a fine, liberal-hearted spirit, a perfect command of his native tongue and a great lover of humanity.

"And now, my friend, I take this opportunity of heartily wishing thee well. If I have been an entertaining companion to thee, I promise thee it is what I have desired."

II

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

WE read and reread *Wuthering Heights* because it is like no other book in the world. The nearest approach to it is not English at all, but Russian. Dostoievsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* has characters in some degree approximating to Heathcliff. In English fiction there is no one in the least like him.

Emily Brontë with her love of life, her passionate adoration of the earth, sweeps us off our feet. She plunges us into a world of elemental lusts and hates and cruelties. Heathcliff is treated brutally and revenges himself even more brutally. The frustrated passion of Catherine for Heathcliff and of Heathcliff for Catherine is scarcely distinguishable from hate; they repay each other with torture for torture, pang for hopeless pang. Judged by his deeds, Heathcliff is as much a monster of evil as Iago, but—and this is what makes Emily Brontë's genius so amazing—we never for a moment judge him by his deeds. The material event never seems to matter. In fact, so far as material actions go, Heathcliff is completely inert. He lets things take their course. His most striking, almost his only violent, action is his running away with Isabella. He does nothing to prevent Catherine from marrying Edgar Linton: his vengeance is completely removed from any material sphere and once accomplished rouses in him no satisfaction: he merely dies. The world of Heathcliff and Catherine is a world of spiritual affinities, of spiritual conflicts and loves. The whole book moves on a spiritual plane except for one lapse, the unwholesome physical passion of Isabella for her husband. "No brutality disgusted her," says Heathcliff. "I've sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure and still creep shamefully back."

Catherine is completely innocent when she gives her body to Edgar while her soul belongs to Heathcliff. This

is her unforgivable sin, the attempt to sunder the body from the soul.

"Nelly," she cries, "I *am* Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am a pleasure to myself, but as my own being."

But out of the raging discord that Emily Brontë creates in the stupendous passion of Catherine and Heathcliff she wrings a strange and terrible harmony. One cannot help but gasp at the quiet, peaceful ending:

"I lingered round them under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth."

In the union of the younger Catherine and the redeemed Hareton one is expected to feel that the souls of the two giant characters are appeased, but we are not interested in that. The deaths of Catherine and Heathcliff matter no more than the death of Cæsar in the play. Catherine is never so much in the picture as when she has passed out of it physically for ever. The whole tragedy is conducted on an invisible and immaterial plane: it is really all written round one line of Browning inverted:

"The passion that left the sky to seek itself in the earth."

We are introduced to it at the very beginning of the book when Lockwood hears and feels the ghost of Catherine: it begins with Heathcliff's passionate outburst at her death: "Oh, God, it is unbearable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!"

It continues without a break for eighteen years and by the side of it any passion that we have read of in modern English fiction seems so puny and frigid as to be almost laughable.

The fight of Catherine to get through to her lover, hampered by his flesh, forms really the great struggle of the book.

"I looked round impatiently"—it is Heathcliff's poignant cry—"I felt her by me—I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*! . . . She showed herself, as she often was in life, a devil to me! And since then, sometimes

more and sometimes less, I've been the sport of that intolerable torture! . . . When I sat in the house with Hareton, it seemed that on going out I should meet her; when I walked on the moors I should meet her coming in. When I went from home, I hastened to return; she *must* be somewhere at the Heights, I was certain! And when I slept in her chamber—I was beaten out of that. I couldn't lie there; for the moment I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow as she did when a child; and I must open my lids to see. And so I opened and closed them a hundred times a night—to be always disappointed! It racked me! . . . It was a strange way of killing: not by inches, but by fractions of hair-breadths, to beguile me with the spectre of a hope through eighteen years."

It is on reading passages like this that one realises the futility of trying to explain away genius. This could only have been written by one who had been whirled in a maelstrom of passion, racked and tortured on the wheel of life in a way that we know Emily Brontë was never called upon to endure, or—it is the result of a divine inspiration vouchsafed, one knows not how, irrespective of mortal experience.

This wearing down of the flesh by the lust of a remorseless spirit is one of the most deeply tragic, most deeply moving ideas ever presented to man.

"In every cloud," he says at the end of the drama, "in every tree—filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day—I am devoured with her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women—my own features—mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her. . . ."

Again: "I am too happy; and yet I'm not happy enough. My soul's bliss kills my body, but do not satisfy itself. . . ."

And again: "There is *one* who won't shrink from my company! By God! she's relentless. Oh, damn it! It's unutterably too much for flesh and blood to bear—even mine."

No—the real ending of *Wuthering Heights* does not lie

in any concluding words of benign skies and quiet earth.

The real end is the tale told by the shepherd whom Lockwood meets on the moor after Heathcliff is dead.

"I was going to the Grange one evening—a dark evening, threatening thunder—and, just at the turn of the Heights, I encountered a little boy with a sheep and two lambs before him; he was crying terribly; and I supposed the lambs were skittish and would not be guided.

"'What is the matter, my little man?' I asked.

"'There's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab,' he blubbered, 'un' I darenut pass 'em.'"

There is no question of redemption or moral problems here. She reveals a point of view above good and evil. In her artistry and technique she is thorough. The minor characters all preserve their individuality from Joseph, the bitter, ranting Calvinist, to Nelly Dean, the teller of the tale. Emily Brontë's accuracy in transcribing the Yorkshire dialect is astonishing. She certainly listened to those Haworth rustics to some advantage, even if she rarely exchanged a word with them. She is as well able to paint the civilised, over-refined type who inhabit Thrushcross Grange as she is to depict the primitive, half-savage inhabitants of Wuthering Heights.

The sensual sentimentalist Isabella rouses the devil in Catherine and loathing in Heathcliff; the illusion of refinement in Edgar results in the terrible divorce of Catherine's body from her soul.

In these two and many other instances we see an unerring psychology in Emily Brontë. Heathcliff's one solitary human feeling, as Charlotte Brontë realised, was not his love for Catherine, which was "a sentiment fierce and inhuman," but his "half-confessed regard for Hareton Earnshaw—the young man whom he has ruined."

Seldom has the spirit of a place brooded over a book as does the spirit of the moors over *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë's descriptions of scenery are as famous as those of Thomas Hardy: they are even less laboured.

"Gimmerton chapel bells were still ringing; and the full, mellow flow of the beck in the valley came soothingly on the ear. It was a sweet substitute for the yet absent murmur of the summer foliage, which drowned that

music about the Grange when the trees were in leaf. At Wuthering Heights it always sounded on quiet days following a great thaw or a season of steady rain."

Exactitude marks her time, her scene and her depiction of passions and emotions.

Her faults are as glaring as her virtues. Probably there has never been a worse-constructed tale. It has to be read many times before one can grasp its great qualities. There is scene within scene, tale within tale of extraordinary intricacy. It is hard enough to remember who is speaking; it is trebly hard to remember who everyone is. But her genius is so all-powerful that once you are gripped by the story you simply don't notice the clumsiness or the creaking of the machinery.

Of a piece with her genius is her style. It is perfect in its simplicity, strength and beauty, very different from that of Charlotte with her "peruse" and "indite." Nor does Emily's dramatic instinct ever fail her: her scenes of passion follow nature and always ring true.

The picture we get of her personality from Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the tall, the strong, the unconquerable, the lover of the moors and the lover of animals, makes her stand out from that book as of a heroic, lovable but altogether mysterious type.

It is to M. Maeterlinck, however, that we owe the last word on Emily herself. To him she is the supreme instance of the self-sufficing soul, independent and regardless of the material event. She shows the insignificance of all "experience" as compared with the spirit.

"Not a single event," he writes, "ever paused as it passed by her threshold; yet did every event she could claim take place in her heart, with incomparable force and beauty, with matchless precision and detail. We say that nothing ever happened, but did not all things really happen to her much more directly and tangibly than with most of us, seeing that everything that took place about her, everything that she saw or heard was transformed within her into thoughts and feelings, into indulgent love, admiration, adoration of life? . . .

"If to her there came nothing of all that passes in love, sorrow, passion or anguish, still did she possess all that abides when emotion has faded away."

And what, you may well ask, has Emily's personality got to do with us who are concentrating our attention on *Wuthering Heights*? Let Swinburne supply the answer:

"The book is what it is because the author was what she was; this is the main and central fact to be remembered. Circumstances have modified the details; they have not implanted the conception. . . . The love which devours life itself, which devastates the present and desolates the future with unquenchable and raging fire, has nothing less pure in it than flame or sunlight. And this passionate and ardent chastity is utterly and unmistakably spontaneous and unconscious. Not till the story is ended, not till the effect of it has been thoroughly absorbed and digested, does the reader even perceive the simple and natural absence of any grosser element, any hint or suggestion of a baser alloy in the ingredients of its human emotion than in the splendour of lightning or the roll of a gathered wave. Then, as on issuing sometimes from the tumult of charging waters, he finds, with something of wonder, how absolutely pure and sweet was the element of living storm with which his own nature has been for a while made one; not a grain in it of soiling sand, not a waif of clogging weed."

We read *Wuthering Heights* then for its exquisite purity of description:—"The snow has quite gone down here, darling, and I only see two white spots on the whole range of moors: the sky is blue, and the larks are singing, and the becks and brooks are all brim full"—the perfection of her style. "If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills me, and if she be motionless, it is sleep," and "I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers," the stark-naked grandeur of its genius.

"*Wuthering Heights*," says Charlotte Brontë, "was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur—power. He wrought with a rude chisel, and from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour, the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal,

dark and frowning, half statue, half rock: in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot."

III

CHARLES LAMB

EVERYTHING in the end comes back to a question of taste. Why should one prefer a Corona cigar to a "gasper," a turkey to tripe, a magnum of Mumm to a quart of "swipes," *crêpe de Chine* and georgette to ninon, Gerald du Maurier to a patter comedian in a suburban pantomime, Titian to Kirchner, or a Savile Row suit to a "reach-me-down"?

It isn't only a question of expense or even of comfort; it's more a question of palate; man needs must love the highest when he sees it. We are most of us too dull of vision and too vitiated by gross familiarity with the commonplace and the vulgar to "see" in the true sense of the word.

There are few benefactors so admirable as those who effect an introduction between our insignificant selves and some genius who has the power to translate us into realms undreamt of in our puny imagination.

Among these geniuses Charles Lamb stands out pre-eminently for one most important reason: he wears no august cloak of ceremony to frighten us away; of all great writers he is the most human and the most lovable. Begin by listening to his preface prefixed to *The Last Essay of Elia*. There you will hear from his own lips the kind of writing he undertakes to give you—"a sort of unlicked, incondite things—villainously pranked in an affected array of antique modes and phrases."

Of himself we read with a grin of delight that "he never cared for the society of what are called good people" . . . that "he herded always, while it was possible, with people younger than himself" . . . that "his manners lagged behind his years. He was too much of the boy-man. The *toga virilis* never sate gracefully on his shoulders."

He is more honest about his weaknesses than any other man of a like fame.

He was certainly not of the "unco' guid," which may

have accounted partially for his dislike of Scotsmen, and he affected no indifferences. As a writer he matters just in so far as he felt "the difference of mankind—to an unhealthy excess. I can look with no indifferent eye upon things or persons. Whatever is, is to me a matter of taste or distaste. . . . I am, in plainer words, a bundle of prejudices . . . the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies."

The hatred with which he views death shows us how completely a lover of life he was:

"I am not content to pass away 'like a weaver's shuttle.' Those metaphors solace me not, nor sweeten the unpalatable draught of mortality. I care not to be carried with the tide, that smoothly bears human life to eternity, and reluct at the inevitable course of destiny. I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacles here. I am content to stand still, at the age to which I am arrived. . . . I do not want . . . to drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave. Any alteration, on this earth of mine . . . puzzles and discomposes me . . . a new state of being staggers me. Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fireside conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself*—do these things go out with Life?"

If you can resist this, which to me is perhaps the most beautiful piece of English prose in existence, you must be a little less than human yourself. So you ask me again why you should read Lamb, and I answer: (1) because he has always something to say and conveys his thought "without smothering it in blankets"; (2) because in antique fancy, quip, oddity, whimsical jest, humour, wit and irony, rare gifts all, he is a supreme master; (3) because his limitations and tragedies were, like ours, many, but his courage in facing them, unlike ours, was cheerful and invincible; the best dramatic and literary critic of his time, he yet had no ear for music ("to read a book, *all stops*, and be obliged to supply the verbal matter"). He was prevented from becoming an actor by an

impediment in his speech; drink went to his head at once and he was fond of it; himself the shining example of the sanity of true genius, his sister killed her father in a mad frenzy; holding women in reverence more than any man, he yet failed to marry the girl of his choice; designed by nature to be a scholar and an Oxford don, he was denied a university education and condemned to thirty-six years of drudgery in a city office . . . the list of Life's little ironies in his case can be piled mountain high, but the supreme irony is that this sufferer at the hands of the malignant fates is our greatest humorist; and (4) because he takes the homely and familiar for his subjects and sheds fresh and beautiful light upon them, making even the most soured among us reconsider life and its possibilities.

IV

JAMES BOSWELL

BOSWELL is essentially a book for the pocket, to be opened at random while waiting for a train or a doctor or a dentist; busy men of affairs like Lord Rosebery have recognised it as the finest "night-cap" in the world. It is the fallacy of thinking that "skipping" is the sign of a shallow mind that has led to the avoidance of what is really the most absorbing study in the world, the revelation of the lives and characters of men of fame. And of all subjects for biography Dr Johnson stands easily first, because he embodies all the essential features of the English character; we see in him "our own magnified and glorified selves."

Furthermore, he has a genius for his biographer; as Sir Walter Raleigh says: "The accident which gave Boswell to Johnson and Johnson to Boswell is one of the most extraordinary pieces of good fortune in literary history."

It is mainly by his conversations that his character is depicted, and it is worth remembering that his *mots* are famous not only for their good sense and sound judgment, but for their freshness and unexpectedness.

"No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned . . . a man in jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company." "Men know that women are an overmatch for them, and therefore they choose the weakest or most ignorant. If they did not think so, they never could be afraid of women knowing as much as themselves." "Even ill-assorted marriages are preferable to cheerless celibacy." "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." "A peace will equally leave the warrior and relater of wars destitute of employment; and I know not whether more is to be dreaded from streets filled with

soldiers accustomed to plunder, or from garrets filled with scribblers accustomed to lie." "I am always for getting a boy forward with his learning . . . I would let him at first read *any* English book . . . because you have done a great deal when you have brought him to have entertainment from a book." "Sir, young men have more virtue than old men; they have more wit and humour and knowledge of life than we had; but then the dogs are not so good scholars."

Once started it is exceedingly difficult to avoid quoting extensively. One feels in all that he says that Dr Johnson had at any rate cleared his mind of cant and proved to the hilt the truth of his aphorisms. You will have noticed how clear-cut and simple they are, clothed in language poles removed from that which tradition has chosen to associate with the "sesquipedalian lexicographer." What sanity of outlook and healthiness of mind is expressed in such a robust sentence as "Every man has a right to utter what he thinks truth, and every other man has a right to knock him down for it"; or, "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life." What joy we feel in the thought that to appreciate such talk as his we need not be literary: it is enough to be English. "Books without the knowledge of life are useless; or what should books teach but the art of living?" We can trust a man who talks like that.

But it is not only for his superb common sense that we love Dr Johnson; it is for the complete portrait of a complex character, rich in virtue, human in its failings and limitations, that we owe Boswell an unpayable debt of gratitude. "Johnson grown old, Johnson in the fullness of his fame and in the enjoyment of a competent fortune, is better known to us than any other man in history." How well do we all recall that exquisite summing up of Macaulay. No novelist would dare to give us so paradoxical a picture. Here is a man full of reverence and piety who yet touches the posts as he walks to avert evil; a man notorious for his brusquerie and lack of manners, who describes himself as "well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity," and of whom Goldsmith said that he had nothing of the bear but his skin; a man far more apprehensive of death than most of us, who yet took the

knife out of the surgeon's hands in order to operate on himself; afflicted by terrible diseases, he was yet one of the most jovial and sociable men of his age; by nature sluggish and averse from work, he yet did more actual drudgery than any ten ordinary mortals.

Practically starving himself, he yet clothed, housed and fed a multitude of ingrates; the great literary dictator of his time, he failed almost entirely to appreciate poetry, and (most paradoxical of all) the great giant of letters of the eighteenth century he has yet left practically nothing that the ordinary man ever reads. "This is the greatness of Johnson, that he is greater than his works. He thought of himself as a man, not as an author . . . duties and friendships and charities were more to him than fame and honour." But the wise man will not be content with the greatness of the man; "the reader who desires to have Johnson to himself for an hour, with no interpreter, cannot do better than turn to the notes on Shakespeare. They are written informally and fluently; they are packed full of observation and wisdom; and their only fault is that they are all too few."

It is hard to imagine that anyone who has read the noble preface to the *Dictionary*, the illuminating preface to and notes on Shakespeare, the thrilling *Life of Richard Savage*, and a selection of the sage essays in *The Rambler* and *The Idler* should rest content until he had read Johnson from end to end. This, then, is why one should read Boswell; you will get a full-length picture of the typical Englishman at his greatest, a lesson on the art of life, and an appetite to read the works of one of the sanest, "all-round" writers who ever lived.

V

WILLIAM HAZLITT

"I THINK W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. . . . I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion," writes Charles Lamb to Robert Southey, but "I wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does."

We read Lamb and Johnson and Pepys for their lovableness; we read Hazlitt for his intensity of passion, his vigorous hate, his sense of glorious enjoyment, his unstudied ease of manner, his healthy attitude to literature, his enduring freshness and his stimulating criticism.

There is little in his life history to endear him to us; he was unfortunate in his relations with the three women who came into his life: "I have wanted one thing only to make me completely happy, but lacking that I lack all"; he was an impossible friend; he even managed to quarrel with Lamb, and though he was an acute and brilliant lecturer, there was little sympathy between him and his audience. The early part of the nineteenth century was the worst possible time for a shy, over-sensitive and easily irritated writer to work in; the obscenities of the *Blackwood's Magazine* clique have left an ineradicable stain—but when they speak of Hazlitt "as rather an ulcer than a man," even after this lapse of time our gorge rises; one ceases to wonder at the vitriolic bitterness which he wastes on his enemies.

We read and admire Hazlitt because they never brought him to his knees; he was a born fighter, a true adventurer; he neither asked nor gave quarter.

Most of us have wondered why a nation so sports-mad as we are should have been content for so long with such inept accounts of mighty conflicts by field and river as we get in our newspapers. Bernard Shaw did his best to portray a boxing contest, but Hazlitt alone among writers

has succeeded in expounding the philosophy of sport and making us live through every moment of a bygone fight as if we had actually witnessed it :

"Neate just then made a tremendous lunge at him, and hit him full in the face. It was doubtful whether he would fall backwards or forwards ; he hung suspended for a second or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. I never saw anything more terrific than his aspect just before he fell. All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. His face was like a human skull, a death's head spouting blood. The eyes were filled with blood, the nose streamed with blood, the mouth gaped blood. He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's *Inferno.*"

It is worthy of notice that he dedicates this description to the ladies : " nor let it seem out of character for the fair to notice the exploits of the brave."

Hazlitt is pre-eminently a fresh-air man. His essay *On Going a Journey*, as R. L. Stevenson said, " is so good that there should be a tax levied on all who have not read it." " Give me the clear blue sky over my head " (what joy it gives one merely to transcribe the well-known words), " and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking ! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy." He brings just this naïve, fresh-air, healthy enthusiasm into all his critical work, and it is this quality that calls forth that noble panegyric of Professor Saintsbury which shows once and for all the reason for reading Hazlitt :

"To anyone who has made a little progress in criticism himself, to anyone who has either read for himself or is capable of reading for himself, of being guided by what is helpful and of neglecting what is not, there is no greater critic than Hazlitt in any language . . . he is the critics' critic as Spenser is the poets' poet."

That this is a bare statement of truth can be seen in the opening lecture on the English poets :

"Poetry is the language of the imagination and the

passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself or for anything else . . . it is not a branch of authorship: it is 'the stuff of which our life is made.'"

These are brave words and, as we should expect from so alert a pugilist, straight from the shoulder.

His *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* is studded with gems of criticism. "It is the peculiar excellence of Shakespeare's heroines that they seem to exist only in their attachment to others. They are pure abstractions of the affections." He is the least derivative of all critics and quotes from one authority alone, himself: hence his conclusions are not those of the academic professors, and it delights our hearts to listen to him trouncing Henry V., that false idol of the mob, and extolling Falstaff at his royal master's expense: "Falstaff is the better man of the two."

And so you again ask me in one sentence why we should read Hazlitt and the answer is, in the words of George Sampson: "A fondness for Hazlitt is a fondness for health in literature" . . . and there is room for health in the literature of to-day.

"Though we are mighty fine fellows nowadays, we cannot write like Hazlitt."

If you want to prove this, turn again to *The Ignorance of the Learned*. If only we could write like that!

VI

SAMUEL PEPYS

ALL girls in their teens and most boys keep what they call a diary, just as most undergraduates and all young unmarried women write what they imagine to be a novel: the value of each of these forms of expression would be considerably enhanced if the writers of either took any pains to learn the technique of their art. Of the ideal diarist two things are pre-eminently required: an all-round interest in life and a complete self-candour which is poles removed from the anæmic sickness of self-love and an effective antidote against it. No one should dare to keep a diary before reading Pepys from end to end, and few people will dare to do so after reading him.

The question is not why we should read Pepys, but why we cannot help reading Pepys. The answer is simple: No novelist would have the audacity to ask us to believe in a hero who was at the same time Secretary to the Admiralty, regenerator of the navy, Master of the Trinity House, master of a city company, Member of Parliament, President of the Royal Society, the friend and counsellor of kings and princes, and yet spent his spare time "picking up" girls in church or behind the counter, making love to his own maids and actresses, hiding his gold in the garden and digging it up again, expressing "mighty content" at the spectacle of men being hanged, drawn and quartered, alternately sulking with his wife and soothing her suspicions about his amours, continually making oaths not to get drunk and breaking them, gloating over his clothes like a peacock, lamenting every expense in the way of entertainment like a miser, frightened to death by fear of ghosts, burglars and the plague, chronicling the details of every delectable dinner that he ate, and every delectable wench that he saw or kissed—in short, expressing all the undignified weaknesses our flesh is heir to.

"No man," says the philosopher, "was ever written down but by himself."

Certainly no man ever wrote himself "down" more honestly than Pepys. Arnold Bennett was only speaking the bare truth when he said that none of us would ever have the pluck to lock ourselves in a room and commit to paper exactly what we have said or done or felt during the whole of one day, even if we knew that no eyes but our own should ever scan the page and that the manuscript should be burnt as soon as it was written. Compromise is an essential concomitant of civilisation: perfect sincerity even with ourselves is impossible. This explains at once the irresistible fascination of Pepys: here is a man who has actually achieved the impossible. Nine-tenths of our staple food in conversation is gossip, not only in suburban drawing-rooms and London clubs, but in every department of life. Scandal-mongering is as much a part and parcel of our life as it was in Lady Sneerwell's day.

These peeps behind the scenes in a man's private life make us much more lenient in our judgment of our own peccadilloes: thousands of men have, we feel, acted as he did and we have done, but only Pepys has had the temerity to confess: there is no entertainment so diverting as that of watching a man give himself away. Pepys does it on every page with an unconscious humour which adds a thousandfold to our enjoyment:

"To the Strand, to my booksellers, and there bought an idle, rogueish French book, which I have bought in plain binding, avoiding the buying of it better bound, because I resolve, as soon as I have read it, to burn it, that it may not stand in the list of books, nor among them, to disgrace them if it should be found." . . . "This day, not for want, but for good husbandry, I sent my father, by his desire, six pair of my old shoes, which fit him, and are good."

"To St Dunstan's church where . . . I stood by a pretty, modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand; but she would not, but got further and further from me; and at last, I could perceive her to take pins out of her pocket to prick me if I should touch her again—which, seeing, I did forbear, and was glad I did spy her design. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid, in a pew close to me, and she on me; and I did go about to take

her by the hand, which she suffered a little, and then withdrew."

Pretty good, this, for the Secretary to the Admiralty! We feel ourselves mighty superior fellows when we read confessions like this, don't we?

"My wife being dressed this day in fair hair, did make me so mad, that I spoke not one word to her, though I was ready to burst with anger . . . in my way home discovered my trouble to my wife, swearing several times, which I pray God forgive me for, and bending my fist, that I would not endure it. She, poor wretch, was surprised with it, and made me no answer all the way home; but there we parted, and I to the office late, and then home, and without supper to bed, vexed . . . up (next day) and by-and-by down comes my wife . . . she promising to wear white locks no more in my sight, which I, like a severe fool, thinking not enough, begun to except against, and made her fly out to very high terms and cry, and in her heat, told me of (my) keeping company with Mrs Knipp (the actress), saying, that if I would never see her more—of whom she hath more reason to suspect than I had heretofore of Pembleton—she would never wear white locks more. This vexed me . . . but to think never to see this woman—at least, to have her here more; and so all very good friends as ever."

"'And so to bed,' writes Mr Secretary Pepys a hundred times in his diary, and we may be sure that each time he joined Mrs Pepys beneath the coverlet he felt that the moment which marked the end of his wonderful day was one deserving careful record." So writes "W. N. P. Barbellion," the only modern diarist possessed in any degree of Pepys' complete self-candour, and, it is worthy of notice, the passage occurs in a book called *Enjoying Life*.

VII

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

BECAUSE he always wrote prose like an artist Walter Savage Landor is worthy to be read at all times and in all moods.

> "And through the trumpet of a child of Rome
> Rang the pure music of the flutes of Greece."

We all know what Swinburne thought about him: the trouble has been that so few people have taken any pains to go further and rediscover this great, imaginative artist for themselves. He is one of those unfortunates whose work we agree to take as read. If we only had a half his feeling for the value and weight of words the English tongue would be ten times richer than it is to-day, richer in harmony, richer in preciseness, richer in simplicity. He had a very definite sense of a writer's duty: "I hate false words, and seek with care, difficulty and moroseness those that fit the thing." Surely when we find a man with so wide a range of thought, so filled with imagination, so much in love with heroism, beauty and freedom, with a prose style that is, of its kind, unrivalled, it is incumbent upon us to sink our prejudice against the classical and do the little extra work which is essential to a true appreciation of that salutary, clear-cut, highly disciplined art. His appeal is to the few who can enjoy the best literature for itself, but there is no reason why this circle should not be far wider than it is.

In his determination not to say anything superfluous he did at times fall into obscurity, but we forgive that in Browning: it is certainly not an all-obtrusive fault in Landor, especially in that later work of his, the *Imaginary Conversations*, on which his reputation now rests. Whether in those short and stirring scenes of emotion and action, or in the long and quiet ones of discussion and reflection, he shows an admirable insight into character, a fine dignity

and urbanity, a mastery over delicate aphorisms on human nature, and a range of interest running from the earliest times to his own era. Take a few of the titles at random if you wish to gauge his range: "Peleus and Thetis," "Leofric and Godiva," "Mahomet and Sergius," "Filippo Lippi and Pope Eugenius IV.," "Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn," "Peter the Great and Alexis," "The Dream of Boccaccio," "The Dream of Petrarca."

Who is there among the narrators of old-time legends capable of charming us so much as the man who makes the slave-girl Rhodopè begin her life story thus:

"Never shall I forget the morning when my father, sitting in the coolest part of the house, exchanged his last measure of grain for a chlamys of scarlet cloth fringed with silver. He watched the merchant out of the door, and then looked wistfully into the corn-chest. I, who thought there was something worth seeing, looked in also, and, finding it empty, expressed my disappointment, not thinking, however, about the corn. A faint and transient smile came over his countenance at the sight of mine. He unfolded the chlamys, stretched it out with both hands before me, and then cast it over my shoulders. I looked down on the glittering fringe and screamed with joy. He then went out; I know not what flowers he gathered, but he gathered many; and some he placed in my bosom, and some in my hair. . . ."

Godiva's one poignant cry to herself, "I hope they will not crowd about me so to-morrow," strikes a more effective note than the whole of Tennyson's poem on the same subject. Filippo Lippi's peerless description of his adventures in Barbary in the service of the corsair Abdul, where he met Almeida of the hazel eyes, Almeida, "cool, smooth and firm as a nectarine gathered before sunrise," is too well known to be quoted here, but is one of the first to be read by those who would see Landor in his natural element of beauty. "The clematis overtopped the lemon and orange trees . . . white pigeons, and others in colour like the dawn of day. . ."—this passage in particular is a masterpiece of descriptive writing. Not easily does one forget the pathetic figure of the discarded Anne Boleyn confronted in prison by her drunken husband. "Love your Elizabeth, my honoured Lord, and God bless you!

She will soon forget to call me; do not chide her; think how young she is. Could I, could I kiss her, but once again! It would comfort my heart—or break it."

His sense of the dramatic is nowhere better shown than in that dialogue, though Spenser's announcement of his terrible loss to Essex goes near to equal it in pathos as does the appearance of Fiammetta to Boccaccio in his dream.

But to prove how absolutely the classical spirit can bring perfection to our native language what need is there of quoting more than this:

"Laodameia died; Helen died; Leda, the beloved of Jupiter, went before. It is better to repose in the earth betimes than to sit up late; better than to cling pertinaciously to what we feel crumbling under us, and to protract an inevitable fall. We may enjoy the present while we are insensible of infirmity and decay: but the present, like a note in music, is nothing but as it appertains to what is past, and what is to come. There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave: there are no voices, O Rhodopè, that are not soon mute, however tuneful: there is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last."

The white heat of austere, restrained passion is here, it is the sublimation of the Latin model. This surely is English as we would have her written, that which is rightly said and therefore sounds rightly. This is one of those certain occasions on which prose can bear a great deal of poetry: indeed there is more real poetry latent in the cadences of this paragraph than in many so-called poems of to-day.

Sir Sidney Colvin happily contrasts Landor's twilight with that more famous one of Keats:

"Within how few minutes has the night closed in upon us! Nothing is left discernible of the promontories, or the long irregular breakers under them. We have before us only a faint glimmering from the shells in our path, and from the blossoms of the arbutus."

"The presence of the twilight and its spell," he very justly comments, "are in the work of Landor not less keenly felt and realised than in the work of Keats,

only they are felt and realised in a widely different manner."

This difference is simply that which lies between the romantic and the classical. Landor will never trust himself to go beyond a bare statement of fact, but beauty is no less implicit in the architecture of straight lines than in the architecture of adornments and embellishments. His aphorisms have passed into our common speech and men call up many beautifully coined phrases from the depths of their consciousness about life and death, forgetful of their source, which are attributable to Landor.

"To stand upon one's guard against Death exasperates her malice, and protracts our sufferings"; "Goodness does not more certainly make men happy than happiness makes them good"; "Those who are quite satisfied sit still and do nothing; those who are not quite satisfied are the sole benefactors of the world"; "We often hear that such or such a thing 'is not worth an old song.' Alas! how very few things are! What precious recollections do some of them awaken! What pleasurable tears do they excite? They purify the stream of life; they can delay it on its shelves and rapids; they can turn it back again to the soft moss amidst which its sources issue."

"Friendship is a vase, which, when it is flamed by heat, or violence, or accident, may as well be broken at once; it never can be trusted after. The more graceful and ornamental it was, the more clearly do we discern the hopelessness of restoring it to its former state. Coarse stones, if they are fractured, may be cemented again; precious ones never."

Reading exquisite thoughts like these clothed in such a perfectly firm manner, we are led to think of the values of phrases and words which, like many of our blessings, lie unrecognised.

"How carelessly, for example, do we say, 'I am delighted to *hear from you*.' No other language has this beautiful expression, which, like some of the most lovely flowers, loses its charm for want of close inspection."

The classical method, you will notice again, of getting close to the object and keeping one's eyes on it, not moving away to such a distance that all the beauty lies in the

vagueness and mystery of the scene. Just as in his dramatic and narrative conversations he springs easily from age to age, shedding a flood of new light on historical episodes, so in his reflective and discursive notes he touches on every topic of human interest, religion, fame, death, love, manners, society, politics, literature; as a critic he moves easily, with felicity of expression and breadth of survey, "the herald of the gods," with a sure sense of what is required of him.

"A perfect piece of criticism must exhibit *where* a work is good or bad; *why* it is good or bad; in what degree it is good or bad; must also demonstrate in what manner and to what extent the same ideas or reflections have come to others, and if they be clothed in poetry, why, by an apparently slight variation, what in one author is mediocrity, in another is excellence."

"To be useful to as many as possible is the especial duty of a critic, and his utility can only be attained by rectitude and precision. He walks in a garden which is not his own; and he neither must gather the blossoms to embellish his discourse, nor break the branches to display his strength. Rather let him point to what is out of order, and help to raise what is lying on the ground."

"When a writer is praised above his merits in his own times, he is certain of being estimated below them in the times succeeding."

"To constitute a great writer the qualities are, adequate expression of just sentiments, plainness without vulgarity, elevation without pomp, sedateness without austerity, alertness without impetuosity."

As we should expect, he lays most stress upon the virtues of moderation and composure. "Whoever has the power of creating has likewise the inferior power of keeping his creations in order. The best poets are the most impressive, because their steps are regular; for without regularity there is neither strength nor state. Look at Sophocles, look at Æschylus, look at Homer."

"There are four things requisite to constitute might, majesty and dominion in a poet: these are creativeness, constructiveness, the sublime, the pathetic. A poet of the first order must have formed, or taken to himself and

modified, some great subject. He must be creative and constructive."

"It is only the wretchedest of poets that wish all they ever wrote to be remembered: some of the best would be willing to lose the most."

When he descends to the particular we find the same strong, sane, comprehensive attitude of criticism. What could be better than his note on Addison?

"I have always been an admirer of Addison, and the oftener I read him, I mean his prose, the more he pleases me. Perhaps it is not so much his style, which, however, is easy and graceful and harmonious, as the sweet temperature of thought in which we always find him, and the attractive countenance, if you will allow me the expression, with which he meets me upon every occasion. It is very remarkable, and therefore I stopped to notice it, that not only what little strength he had, but even all his grace and ease, forsake him when he ventures into poetry."

He defends the use of idiom ("Every good writer has much idiom; it is the life and spirit of language") and attacks the use of quotation: "Before I let fall a quotation I must be taken by surprise. I seldom do it in conversation, seldomer in composition; for it mars the beauty and unity of style; especially when it invades it from a foreign tongue. A quoter is either ostentatious of his acquirements, or doubtful of his cause. And, moreover, he never walks gracefully who leans upon the shoulder of another, however gracefully that other may walk."

Of his verse epigrams all the world knows *Rose Aylmer* and most people his epitome of himself:

"I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
It sinks, and I am ready to depart."

It would be hard to improve upon the accuracy of that description or the artistry with which it is expressed.

"I shall dine late; but the dining-room will be well lighted, the guests few and select."

It is with the object of enticing you to join that group

of eclectics that I have attempted to show you what manner of man he is who invites you to his table. The conversation will be rich, the viands delicious to an Epicurean palate, but if you have no taste and your talk is vulgar you will only be bored.

VIII

JOHN DONNE

READERS of Rupert Brooke will almost certainly have made the acquaintance of Donne the poet, admirers of Mr Logan Pearsall Smith will with equal certainty have dipped into the excellent selections which that versatile writer has made of Dr Donne's sermons.

But to search for a reason why everyone should read Donne we need go no further than George Saintsbury's words:

"For those who have experienced, or who at least understand, the ups-and-downs, the ins-and-outs of human temperament, the alternations not merely of passion and satiety, but of passion and laughter, of passion and melancholy reflection, of passion earthly enough and spiritual rapture almost heavenly, there is no poet and hardly any writer like Donne."

Our appetite for Donne was probably first whetted by Izaak Walton, who wrote so admirable a biography of him. His personality intrigues us from the start, his Marlowesque thirst for experience, experience of the intellect and experience of sensation, finds a sympathetic echo today in the minds of most of us. He knew a good deal about medicine, law, astronomy and physiology, as well as theology: he joined the expedition of Essex to Cadiz in 1596: he was ever adventuring in science, in love and in travel. At the age of forty-two, poverty-stricken and a failure, he took Orders and became one of the greatest preachers we have ever had. He poured his whole soul into his sermons, and held his congregations spellbound with his gorgeous prose, "perhaps never equalled for the beauty of its rhythm and the Shakespearean magnificence of its diction": he dwelt mainly on the subject of Sin (about which he knew a good deal from experience), Death, God, Heaven and Infinity. Listen to this on Eternity: "And all the powerfull Kings, and all the beautifull

Queenes of this world, were but as a bed of flowers, some gathered at six, some at seven, some at eight, All in one Morning, in respect of this Day. In all the two thousand yeares of Nature, before the Law given by *Moses*, and the two thousand yeares of Law. . . . In all this six thousand, and in all those, which God may be pleased to adde, . . . in this House of his Fathers, there was never heard quarter clock to strike, never seen minute glasse to turne." Or this personal confession (rarest of delights in sermons): "I throw my selfe downe in my Chamber, and I call in, and invite God, and his Angels thither, and when they are there, I neglect God and his Angels, for the noise of a Flie, for the ratling of a Coach, for the whining of a doore; I talke on, in the same posture of praying; Eyes lifted up; knees bowed downe; as though I prayed to God; and, if God, or his Angels should aske me, when I thought last of God in that prayer, I cannot tell; Sometimes I finde that I had forgot what I was about, but when I began to forget it, I cannot tell. A memory of yesterdays pleasures, a feare of to morrows dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine eare, a light in mine eye, an anything, a nothing, a fancy, a Chimera in my braine, troubles me in my prayer. So certainely is there nothing, nothing in spirituall things, perfect in this world."

"If Donne," says Robert Lynd, "had written much prose in this kind, his *Sermons* would be as famous as the writings of any of the saints since the days of the Apostles."

If only more sermons contained such human touches as the following, the modern church-goers would be more plentiful:—

"I am not all here, I am here now preaching upon this text, and I am at home in my Library considering whether S. Gregory, or S. Hierome, have said best of this text, before. I am here speaking to you, and yet I consider by the way, in the same instant, what it is likely you will say to one another, when I have done, you are not all here neither; you are here now, hearing me, and yet you are thinking that you have heard a better sermon somewhere else, of this text before."

But as an example of his highest power of eloquence and impassioned imagination I will quote a passage that can challenge any passage in the whole range of English prose:

"The ashes of an Oak in the Chimney, are no Epitaph of that Oak, to tell me how high or how large that was; It tels me not what flocks it sheltered while it stood, nor what men it hurt when it fell. The dust of great persons graves is speechlesse too, it sayes nothing, it distinguishes nothing: As soon the dust of a wretch whom thou wouldest not, as of a Prince whom thou couldest not look upon, will trouble thine eyes, if the winde blow it thither; and when a whirle-winde hath blowne the dust of the Church-yard into the Church, and the man sweeps out the dust of the Church into the Church-yard, who will undertake to sift those dusts again, and to pronounce, This is the Patrician, this is the noble flowre, and this the Yeomanly, this the Plebeian bran. . . ."

But it is Donne the poet, the Donne who wrote

> "Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks and so distinctly wrought,
> That one might almost say her body thought,"

the Donne of

> "I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
> Who died before the God of Love was born,"

of

> "I wonder by my troth what thou and I
> Did till we loved?"

of the

> "Bracelet of bright hair about the bone,"

that attracts the ordinary man and woman of to-day.

In spite of repeated incentives to listen, we turn deaf ears to sermons: towards poetry we are inclined to be perhaps too kind.

Donne is all the more important as a poet because he treats of the universal passion of love in more phases than any other poet. He was the complete experimentalist in love, both in actual life and in his work. He is frankly in search of bodily experiences:

> "Whoever loves, if he do not propose
> The right true end of love, he's one that goes
> To sea for nothing but to make him sick."

He is brutal :

" For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love."

He is inconstant :

" I can love any, so she be not true."

He bewails the inconstancy of women :

" Though she were true when you met her,
And last till you write your letter,
Yet she
Will be
False, ere I come, to two or three."

His passion for sheer ugliness carries him away time after time :

" Had it been some bad smell, he would have thought
That his own feet, or breath, that smell had wrought."

Or again :

" And like a bunch of ragged carrots stand
The short swollen fingers of thy gouty hand."

In his *Elegies* he tells stories of his conquests dramatically, in full detail, satirically, sensually. In *Jealousy* we are given an exact picture of the deformed husband who,

" Swol'n and pampered with great fare,
Sits down and snorts, cag'd in his basket chair "

—so that the poet and his mistress perforce have to " play in another house," away from those " towering eyes, that flamed with oily sweat of jealousy."

In *The Perfume* we see the girl's " immortal mother, which doth lie still buried in her bed, yet will not die," who, fearing lest her daughter be swollen, embraces her and names strange meats to try her longings : we see

" The grim-eight-foot-high-iron-bound-serving-man
That oft names God in oaths, and only then."

But the scent that the lover uses gives him away and so he is by her "hydroptic father catechized."

There is a good deal of frank naturalism in the elegy entitled *To his Mistress Going to Bed*, but it is healthily coarse, though scarcely quotable even in these times, which is a pity.

"There is no penance due to innocence."

But playing as he does on all the notes of all the different sorts of love, Donne gives the impression of one who attained in the end an abiding love for one person, Anne More, his wife.

In *The Ecstasy* we see him crying out against passionate friendship:

"But O alas, so long, so far,
Our bodies why do we forbear?"

and makes an unanswerable point in this verse:

"So must pure lovers' souls descend
T'affections and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great Prince in prison lies.
To our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love reveal'd may look;
Love's mysteries in souls do grow
But yet the body is the book."

And in *The Anniversary* he retracts all that he had once said about inconstancy:

"Here upon earth we are Kings, and none but we
Can be such Kings, nor of such subjects be.
Who is so safe as we, where none can do
Treason to us, except one of us two?
True and false fears let us refrain;
Let us live nobly, and live, and add again
Years and years unto years, till we attain
To write three-score: This is the second of our reign."

There are few lovelier lyrics than *Break of Day*:

> "Stay, O sweet, and do not rise;
> The light that shines comes from thine eyes;
> The day breaks not, it is my heart,
> Because that you and I must part.
> Stay, or else my joys will die
> And perish in their infancy."

Or, to take a complete poem, none shows Donne in truer, finer light than *The Dream*:

> "Dear love, for nothing less than thee
> Would I have broke this happy dream;
> It was a theme
> For reason, much too strong for fantasy.
> Therefore thou waked'st me wisely; yet
> My dream thou brokest not, but continued'st it.
> Thou art so true that thoughts of thee suffice
> To make dreams truths, and fables histories;
> Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,
> Not to dream all my dream, let's act the rest.
>
> As lightning, or a taper's light,
> Thine eyes, and not thy noise waked me;
> Yet I thought thee
> —For thou lovest truth—an angel, at first sight;
> But when I saw thou saw'st my heart,
> And knew'st my thoughts beyond an angel's art,
> When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when
> Excess of joy would wake me, and camest then,
> I must confess, it could not choose but be
> Profane, to think thee anything but thee."

There is enough nastiness, eccentricity, coarseness, roughness and extravagance in Donne to put off many fastidious readers: but his faults lie open to the sky: his beauties are frequently hidden, but they are worth searching for.

And yet—a word of warning—let George Saintsbury give it: "No one who thinks *Don Quixote* a merely funny

book, no one who sees in Aristophanes a dirty-minded fellow with a knack of Greek versification . . . need trouble himself even to attempt to like Donne."

We read Donne, then, for his fiery imagination, for his deep and subtle analysis, for his humanity, for his passion, for his anti-sentimentalism, for his eager search "to find a north-west passage of his own" in intellect and morals, for the richness and rarity of the gems with which all his work, both prose and poetry, is studded, for his modernity and freshness. We read Donne as a corrective of lazy thinking: he frees us from illusion.

IX

SUCH A BOOK AS *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA*

ONE imagines Nigel Playfair and Arnold Bennett suddenly starting hares over their cigars after dinner. "What shall we do next?" asks N. P. plaintively. "Aren't there any old plays that are really good that the public knows nothing of?"

A. B. gets up wearily and turns over a Dodsley or a Nimmo. "We don't want to cut into the preserves of the Phœnix," he grumbles. "*The Duchess of Malfi*, *Volpone*, *All for Love* . . . do you mean that sort of thing?"

"Good God, no," replies Nigel truculently. "I meant something light—something with a 'zip' about it."

"*The Critic* or *A Trip to Searborough*?" queries A. B. He is getting sleepy and is rather bored.

"This is for the Lyric, Hammersmith, *our* Lyric, not the Tooting Bec Hippodrome or the Moss Empires."

"Well, what about *The Beggar's Opera*?" answers A. B. so languidly that Nigel doesn't hear. He repeats it.

"The Beggar's what?" asks Nigel. "Never heard of it."

"I'll sing you some of the songs in it," says Arnold, waking up.

"No, no, for God's sake, no. We'll take it as sung."

That, I truly believe, is how plays get played. At any rate this is how plays get read.

There are dozens of things lying buried in your old library, but you won't take the trouble to unearth them. But now, well, you've only got to dine earlier and enter a detestable Tube and cross a more detestable Broadway and you can see *The Beggar's Opera* most exquisitely done for you on the stage. You can read the more piquant bits of it during the interval in a truly Martin Seckerish edition if your companion goes to the bar; this is quite

different from the play as one hears it. The eye is not so easily shocked as the ear. But I am wandering from my point, which is this: "Why we should read Such a Book as *The Beggar's Opera*" is my heavily weighted heading to this chapter.

Read *The Beggar's Opera*, yes, and then see if you can't find some of the scores of other neglected plays equally well worth playing, and make such a fuss about them that soon Nigel and Arnold or some other lover of the theatre is compelled to put them on.

There is no dearth of mirth-provoking material, which is still not quite intellectually futile—— But I'm wandering again. Let me begin.

We read *The Beggar's Opera* for much the same reason that we read Fielding, because it is, as Maurice Baring says, English, as English as a landscape by Constable, or eggs and bacon. It has this added advantage to those who see it acted, that it is full of ravishing English music. Written in the first place in ridicule of the musical Italian opera, we now read it or see it to regain some of that atmosphere of London life, of brilliant wit, of racy coarseness, of satiric richness, which marked the healthy century that gave it birth.

A bigger set of rogues than we here meet with it would be impossible to imagine, but *nos hæc novimus esse nihil* and we laugh undisturbed for once by any moral twinges. "All Men are thieves in love, and like a woman the better for being another's property": that is the sort of proverb we like to hear in such a play: the more we hear the merrier we grow.

How amazingly appropriate too are the songs: when Mrs Peachum learns that Polly is really married to Macheath one feels that there was no other way for her but to burst out into song:

"Our Polly is a sad Slut! nor heeds what we have taught her.
I wonder any Man alive will ever rear a Daughter!
For she must have both Hoods and Gowns, and Hoops to swell her Pride,
With Scarfs and Stays, and Gloves and Lace; and she will have Men beside;

And when she's drest with Care and Cost, all tempting, fine and gay,
As Men should serve a Cowcumber, she flings herself away."

"Do you think your Mother and I should have liv'd comfortably so long together, if ever we had been married?" roars Peachum in a fine frenzy.

"Can you support the Expence of a Husband, Hussy, in Gaming, Drinking and Whoring? Have you Money enough to carry on the daily Quarrels of Man and Wife about who shall squander most? . . . Why, thou foolish Jade, thou wilt be as ill-us'd, and as much neglected, as if thou hadst married a Lord," shrieks her mother.

Polly confesses that she loves her husband and Mrs Peachum faints at the awful news; revived by a double dose of cordial, she joins her daughter in one of the most delicious songs in the play.

"O Polly, you might have toy'd and kist.
By keeping Men off, you keep them on.

POLLY

But he so teaz'd me,
And he so pleas'd me,
What I did, you must have done."

Her father then suggests that Polly has Macheath "peach'd" at the next Sessions, so that she can become a rich widow, and leaves her to digest the unpalatable idea. Macheath comes in and Polly urges him to fly, which he does.

Act II. opens with one of the finest choruses imaginable, sung by a gang of pickpockets in a tavern near Newgate:

"Fill every glass, for wine inspires us,
And fires us
With Courage, Love and Joy.
Women and wine should Life employ.
Is there ought else on Earth desirous?"

Macheath comes in and announces to the gang that he must go into hiding for a week or two and is left alone to ruminate upon life:

"A Man who loves Money, might as well be contented with one Guinea, as I with one Woman . . ." and is immediately joined by a gang of lovely ladies, by far the most attractive of whom is Jenny Diver.

"As prim and demure as ever! There is not any Prude, though ever so high bred, hath a more sanctify'd Look, with a more mischievous Heart. Ah! thou art a dear artful Hypocrite. . . ." Jenny, who never drinks "Strong-Waters" but when she has "the Cholic," who never goes "to the Tavern with a Man, but in the View of Business." "I have other Hours, and other sort of Men for my Pleasure." It is Jenny who sings one of the sweetest songs in the play:

> "Before the Barn-door crowing,
> The Cock by Hens attended,
> His Eyes around him throwing,
> Stands for a while suspended.
> Then One he singles from the Crew,
> And cheers the happy Hen;
> With how do you do, and how do you do,
> And how do you do again."

It is Jenny who then blindfolds him and betrays him to Peachum and the constables.

We accompany, loath as Macheath to part company with Jenny, the Captain to Newgate, where Lucy Lockit appears to add to his discomfiture by wishing to "be made an honest woman of."

The two jailers then come in and fight over a point of honour and depart. Meanwhile Macheath endeavours to make Lucy free him and is on the point of succeeding when Polly appears and the fat is properly in the fire. The situation gives rise to the most famous song in the play:

> "How happy I could be with either,
> Were t'other dear charmer away!
> But while you thus teaze me together,
> To neither a word will I say:
> But tol de rol. . . ."

As a result of which the two girls turn on each other and Peachum enters, giving Macheath a chance to reassure Lucy of his love for her, so she gets the keys and lets him escape.

We then have an exquisite passage between Peachum and Mrs Trapes, beginning in an inimitable vein :

Peachum. One may know by your Kiss, that your Ginn is excellent.

Trapes. I was always very curious in my Liquors. . . . Fill it up—I take as large Draughts of Liquor, as I did of Love. . . . I hate a Flincher in either.

Lucy, finding that she has released Macheath, only to let him fly to Polly, resolves to poison her with rat's-bane mixed in her gin, which Polly refuses : " Brandy and men (though women love them ever so well) are always taken by us with some Reluctance—unless 'tis in private."

Macheath is again captured, this time in a gaming-house, and sings a great number of songs (one to the tune of *Sally in our Alley*) in the " Condemn'd Hold " while he drowns his sorrows in drink. To send the audience away in a good humour he is reprieved at the last moment and rejoins his doxie in a dance.

Such is the substance of a play which few people took the trouble to read before they were unexpectedly given the chance of seeing it acted at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

But whether we read it or see it, there are certain points about it which make it perennially worth reading and worth seeing.

It is free from sentimentality, it is full of robust sense, and clears the air once and for all from the taint of prurience that has fallen upon us. The irony of it is mirth-provoking and delicious. It is a racy and true picture of human nature stripped naked. There is no savagery, only rascally good humour, true gaiety and buoyant vitality. As an antidote to depression or bad temper it would be hard to think of any quicker cut back to the joy of life.

And the best of it is that there are dozens of other plays equally enjoyable hidden away in the treasure-house of old English plays, waiting for you to unearth and rediscover them.

PART II

SOME CONTEMPORARIES

I

GEORGE SANTAYANA

MR LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH, for whom most of us have a deep admiration, reads George Santayana because he finds in this philosopher "much writing like that of the older Essayists on large human subjects, which seemed . . . more interesting and in many ways more important than anything . . . in the works of other contemporary writers . . . it has been his aim to reconstruct our modern, miscellaneous, shattered picture of the world, and to build, not of clouds, but of the materials of this common earth, an edifice of thought, a fortress or temple for the modern mind, in which every natural impulse could find, if possible, its opportunity for satisfaction, and every ideal aspiration its shrine and altar."

In a word, then, we should read Mr Santayana because he has a definite philosophy, a rational conception of the world and man's allotted place in it. But what, you will ask, does a modern novelist want with a general philosophy when he has made it his business merely to describe what he observes in the particular lives of individual men and women? To which I would reply that though the philosopher has his eyes steadily turned to the infinite and contemplates eternal values in the round, by the light of reason, the novelist at times likes to turn from transcribing the trivial incidents of everyday life and from probing the characters of men and women to join the philosopher in his serene detachment. What is good for the novelist is good for every man.

Even the business man or the sportsman occasionally thinks of a future life either vividly and with acute misery when he has suffered an irreparable loss or loosely and vaguely when he attends the religious rites of his church. To such men—that is, to all of us who are not philosophers—such a passage as the following acts like a tonic or tests our courage.

"To imagine a second career is a pleasing antidote for ill-fortune: the poor soul wants another chance. But how should a future life be constituted if it is to satisfy this demand, and how long need it last? It would evidently have to go on in an environment closely analogous to earth; I could not, for instance, write in another world the epics which the necessity of earning my living may have stifled here, did that other world contain no time, no heroic struggles, or no metrical language. Nor is it clear that my epics, to be perfect, would need to be quite endless. If what is foiled in me is really poetic genius and not simply a tendency toward perpetual motion, it would not help me if in heaven, in lieu of my dreamt-of epics, I were allowed to beget several robust children. In a word, if hereafter I am to be the same man improved I must find myself in the same world corrected."

In a moment we feel as if the windows were opened for the first time in our minds and the pure air of Reason allowed to circulate in our weak lungs. Such clarity of thought may kill us by its freshness; on the other hand, it may restore us to real health. May not our pathetic clinging to a belief in immortality be only a gross form of selfish terror? The philosopher would raise us to a higher plane of thought.

"What a despicable creature must a man be, and how sunk below the level of the most barbaric virtue, if he cannot bear to live and die for his children, for his art, or for his country. . . ." "Let a man once overcome his selfish terror at his own finitude, and his finitude itself is, in one sense, overcome. . . ." "Nothing can be meaner than the anxiety to live on, to live on any how and in any shape: a spirit with any honour is not willing to live except in its own way, and a spirit with any wisdom is not over-eager to live at all."

"While the primitive and animal side of man may continue to cling to existence at all hazards and to find the thought of extinction intolerable, his reason and finer imagination will build a new ideal on reality better understood, and be content that the future he looks to should be enjoyed by others. . . ."

"The truth is cruel, but it can be loved, and it makes free those who have loved it."

So we are bidden to follow the advice of Horace:

"He lives happy and master over himself who can say daily, I have lived."

It is this fierce determination to face the truth of things and not to take refuge in comfortable superstitions that endears the philosopher to us and makes us sympathise with his scorn for the irrationality of Browning.

"It [Browning's "philosophy"] is in spirit the direct opposite of the philosophic maxim of regarding the end, of taking care to leave a finished life and a perfect character behind us. It is the opposite, also, of the religious *memento mori*, of the warning that time is short before we go to our account. According to Browning, there is no account: we have an infinite credit . . . his notion is simply that the game of life, the exhilaration of action, is inexhaustible . . . but it is unmeaning to call such an exercise heaven . . . it is a mere euphemism to call this perpetual vagrancy a development of the soul."

Closely related to his thoughts on Immortality are Mr Santayana's caustic comments on fame.

"The highest form of vanity is love of fame. It is a passion easy to deride but hard to understand, and in men who live at all by imagination almost impossible to eradicate. The good opinion of posterity can have no possible effect on our fortunes, and the practical value which reputation may temporarily have is quite absent in posthumous fame. . . . What comfort would it be to Virgil that boys still read him at school, or to Pindar that he is sometimes mentioned in a world from which everything he loved has departed?" . . . But yet the ancients "often identified fame with immortality, a subject on which they had far more rational sentiments than have since prevailed. . . . Fame consists in the immortality of a man's work, his spirit, his efficacy, in the perpetual rejuvenation of his soul in the world."

The whole essence of Mr Santayana's teaching on this point is that we become a portion of that loveliness which once we made more lovely. It is a wholesome, sanative doctrine this . . . it leads us to the belief that if we are butterflies, we have a real immortality in that we have added something to the eternal beauty of the world: if we are beetles . . . and are squashed, I take it that one

more piece of beastliness is suppressed at our extinction and we ought to be glad at that. Consequently, if we accept his theory of the finitude of life, we are braced up to do our part while we can. We strive to round off each day with the phrase, "I have lived," and we see our immortality in our oneness with the Universe, not in the endless projection of our own feeble personality.

And after the philosophy of life we turn naturally to thoughts on Love.

"Not to believe in love is a great sign of dulness," we read. "It is a true natural religion . . . it sanctifies a natural mystery . . . it recognises that what it worshipped under a figure was truly the principle of all good. The loftiest edifices need the deepest foundations. Love would never take so high a flight unless it sprung from something profound and elementary. . . . When the generative energy is awakened all that can ever be is virtually called up and made consciously potential; and love yearns for the universe of values. . . . As a harp, made to vibrate to the fingers, gives some music to the wind, so the nature of man, necessarily susceptible to woman, becomes simultaneously sensitive to other influences, and capable of tenderness toward every object."

And after love, religion.

He adds an all-important corollary to Bacon's well-known axiom that "a little philosophy inclineth men's minds to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion."

"When Bacon penned the sage epigram," he continues, "he forgot to add that the God to whom depth in philosophy brings back men's minds is far from being the same from whom a little philosophy estranges them. It would be pitiful indeed if mature reflection bred no better conceptions than those which have drifted down the muddy stream of time, where tradition and passion have jumbled everything together."

I suppose that though most of us have had to listen to an amazing amount of nonsense about immortality and love, on the subject of religion we have rarely been taught anything that was not nonsense. Mr Santayana clears the ground as with a hatchet. We feel after reading him as if we were able to see clearly for the first time.

In *Prosaic Misunderstandings* he makes us realise precisely what we mean by religion.

"Religious doctrines would do well to withdraw their pretensions to be dealing with matters of fact. . . . The excellence of religion is due to an idealisation of experience which, while making religion noble if treated as poetry, makes it necessarily false if treated as science. . . . The mass of mankind is divided into two classes—the Sancho Panzas who have a sense for reality, but no ideals, and the Don Quixotes with a sense for ideals, but mad. The expedient of recognising facts as facts and accepting ideals as ideals, although apparently simple enough, seems to elude the normal human power of discrimination."

"A god is a conceived victory of mind over nature. A visible god is the consciousness of such a victory momentarily attained. The vision soon vanishes, the sense of omnipotence is soon dispelled by recurring conflicts with hostile forces: but the momentary illusion of that realised good has left us with the perennial knowledge of good as an ideal. Therein lies the essence and the function of religion."

Christianity conquered the world because it proclaimed a new poetry, a new ideal and a new God. "The moving power was a fable . . . it carried the imagination into a new sphere . . . it was a whole world of poetry descended among men."

The Christian drama, he tells us, is a magnificent poetic rendering of the fact that what is false in the science of facts may be true in the science of values: while the existence of things must be understood by referring them to their causes, which are mechanical, their functions can only be explained by what is interesting in their results: in other words, by their relation to human nature and to human happiness . . . so the whole of Christian doctrine is thus religious and efficacious only when it becomes poetry.

Christian fictions beguiled the intellect but they enlightened the imagination: they made man understand the pathos and nobility of his life, the necessity of discipline, the possibility of sanctity.

And though Mr Santayana would have us accept his dictum that matters of religion should never be matters of

controversy, he does not hesitate to become controversial himself over what he calls Protestantism (which he would doubtless say is not a matter of religion at all). He lashes out in no uncertain tones: "It is sentimental, its ritual is meagre and unctuous, it expects no miracles, it thinks optimism akin to piety and regards profitable enterprise and practical ambition as a sort of moral vocation."

It is not surprising in view of what he has to say about the world of politics and religion to find that he expresses relief at being able to turn from them to almost any art, "where what is good is altogether and finally good and what is bad is at least not treacherous: . . . how doubly blessed it becomes to find a sphere where limitation is an excellence, where diversity is a beauty, and where every man's ambition is consistent with every other man's and even favourable to it . . . with an artist no sane man quarrels, any more than with the colours of a child's eyes." But he ponders upon the rarity of æsthetic feeling. "Men are habitually insensible to beauty . . . moralists are much more able to condemn than to appreciate the effects of the arts . . . and beauty (in which he finds a hint of happiness) is something indescribable . . . it is the clearest manifestation of perfection, and the best evidence of its possibility. Beauty is a pledge of the possible conformity between the soul and nature, and consequently a ground of faith in the prevalence of the good."

So we find that in his eyes the value of all art lies in making people happy ". . . to discriminate happiness is the very soul of art, which expresses experience without distorting it." The queer thing is that though men ought to pursue happiness, they seldom do so . . . by happiness Mr Santayana means friendship, wealth, reputation, power, and influence added to family life. "If, then, artists and poets are unhappy, it is, after all, because happiness does not interest them; they cannot seriously pursue it, because its components are not components of beauty, and being in love with beauty, they neglect and despise those unæsthetic social virtues in the operation of which happiness is found." On the other hand, those who pursue happiness conceived in terms of money, success, respectability and so on miss more often than not

that real and fundamental part of happiness which flows from the senses and imagination. "This element is what the love of beauty can add to life: for beauty can also be a cause and a factor of happiness. Yet the happiness of loving beauty is either too sensuous to be stable, or else too ultimate, too sacramental, to be accounted happiness by the worldly mind."

When he descends to particularise upon the arts we are surprised to find that he has nothing to say about painting, and begins with music, music which he calls "essentially useless, as life is: but both lend utility to their conditions . . . pure music is pure art. Its extreme abstraction is balanced by its entire spontaneity, and while it has no external significance, it bears no internal curse . . . it is the chosen art of a mind to whom the world is still foreign . . . it serves to keep alive the conviction that perfection is essentially possible; it reminds us that there are worlds far removed from the actual which are yet living and very near to the heart . . ." and so while it is "the purest and most impressive of the arts, it is the least human and instructive of them."

Literature, according to his theory, takes a middle course between music and science and tries to subdue music, which for its purposes would be futile and too abstract, into conformity with general experience, making music thereby significant. Literature "looks at natural things with an incorrigibly dramatic eye, turning them into permanent unities (which they never are) and almost into persons. The literary man is an interpreter and hardly succeeds, as the musician may, without experience and mastery of human affairs. His art is half genius and half fidelity. He needs inspiration . . . yet inspiration alone will lead him astray, for his art is relative to something other than its own formal impulse; it comes to clarify the real world, not to encumber it."

He rightly differentiates between the philosopher and the poet when he says that the philosopher in his best moments is a poet, while the poet "has his worst moments when he succeeds in being a philosopher."

"Poetry is an attenuation, a rehandling, an echo of crude experience; it is itself a theoretic vision of things at arm's-length. . . . The first element which the intellect

rejects in forming its ideas of things is the emotion which accompanies the perception; and this emotion is the first thing the poet restores. He stops at the image, because he stops to enjoy. . . . Poetry takes every present passion and every private dream in turn for the core of the universe." He finds that the prosaic rendering of experience has a greater value, if only the experience covers enough human interests: youth and aspiration indulge in poetry . . . for "youth, being as yet little fed by experience, can find volume and depth only in the soul; the half-seen, the supra-mundane, the inexpressible, seem to it alone beautiful and worthy of homage. . . . Mature interests centre on soluble problems and tasks capable of execution . . . to dwell, as irrational poets do, on some private experience, on some emotion without representative or ulterior value, seems a waste of time. Fiction becomes less interesting than affairs, and poetry turns into a sort of incompetent whimper, a childish foreshortening of the outspread world."

On the other hand, Mr Santayana finds in the abstractness of prose its great defect. It must convey intelligence, but intelligence clothed in a language that lends the message an intrinsic value and makes it delightful to apprehend apart from its importance in ultimate theory or practice. It is in that measure a fine art . . . a poetry "pervasively representative." In a most stimulating little essay on *The Supreme Poet* the philosopher propounds his ideal for literature. "It might be throughout a work of art. It would become so not by being ornate, but by being appropriate: and the sense of a great precision and justness would come over us as we read or write. It would delight us; it would make us see how beautiful, how satisfying, is the art of being observant, economical, and sincere."

Furthermore, life has a margin of play which might become broader. . . . "To the art of working well a civilised race would add the art of playing well. To play with nature and make it decorative, to play with the overtones of life and make them delightful, is a sort of art." The new poet of this double insight would "live in the continual presence of all experience, and respect it: he would at the same time understand nature, the ground of

that experience; and he would also have a delicate sense for the ideal echoes of his own passions, and for all the colours of his possible happiness." It is sad to think that this supreme poet is in limbo still, but now that the path has been so clearly indicated for him, are we not justified in thinking that Mr Santayana is merely the herald of his great dawn?

Just as he sees no great poet even in embryo, so he laments the death of all great men:

"A great man need not be virtuous nor his opinions right, but he must have a firm mind, a distinctive, luminous character . . . greatness is spontaneous . . . simplicity, trust in some one clear instinct, are essential to it; but the spontaneous variation must be in the direction of some possible sort of order . . . how should there be any great heroes, saints, artists, philosophers or legislators in an age when nobody trusts himself . . . in an age when the word *dogmatic* is a term of reproach? Greatness has character and severity, it is deep and sane, it is distinct and perfect. For this reason there is none of it to-day. . . . A great imaginative apathy has fallen on the mind. One-half the learned world is amused in tinkering obsolete armour, as Don Quixote did his helmet; deputing it, after a series of catastrophes, to be at last sound and invulnerable. The other half, the naturalists who have studied psychology and evolution, look at life from the outside, and the processes of Nature make them forget her uses."

These are hard words, but who can say that they are undeserved?

Not less scornful is he over our contempt for the intellect. "The degree of intelligence which this age possesses makes it so very uncomfortable that it asks for something less vital, and sighs for what evolution has left behind. In the presence of such cruelly distinct things as astronomy or such cruelly confused things as theology it feels *la nostalgie de la boue*." Instead of freeing their intelligence, our enslaved contemporaries elude it. They cannot rise to a detached contemplation of earthly things; they revert to sensibility: having no stomach for the ultimate, they burrow downwards towards the primitive. "To be so preoccupied with vitality is a symptom of anæmia."

Yet Mr Santayana is not the sort of man to indulge in sweeping denunciations. There is a reverse to this picture of the modern world.

"Without great men and without clear convictions this age is nevertheless very active intellectually: it is studious, empirical, inventive, sympathetic. Its wisdom consists in a certain contrite openness of mind; it flounders, but at least in floundering it has gained a sense of possible depths in all directions."

But our poetry is the poetry of barbarism, because this age has no sense for perfection; its ideals are negative and partial, its moral strength is a blind vehemence. So we get no total vision, no grasp of the whole reality, no capacity for a sane and steady idealisation. In his little essays on Materialism and Morals we find this outspoken philosophy on the subject of war:

"There are panegyrists of war who say that without a periodical bleeding a race decays and loses its manhood. Experience is directly opposed to this shameless assertion. It is war that wastes a nation's wealth, chokes its industries, kills its flower, narrows its sympathies, condemns it to be governed by adventurers, and leaves the puny, deformed, and unmanly to breed the next generation. Internecine war, foreign and civil, brought about the greatest set-back which the life of reason has ever suffered; it exterminated the Greek and Italian aristocracies. Instead of being descended from heroes, modern nations are descended from slaves: and it is not their bodies only that show it. . . . To call war the soil of courage and virtue is like calling debauchery the soil of love."

But we read a philosopher mainly, I take it, to see how he himself reached his serene height of detached interest in the universe. We who have no philosophic bent fondly imagine that it is only after despairing of instinctive happiness that the philosopher turns his back on the struggle of life with his shout of "Sour Grapes." Reading Mr Santayana will correct this delusion.

"We cannot venerate anyone in whom appreciation is not divorced from desire. And this elevation and detachment of the heart need not follow upon any great disappointment; it is finest and sweetest where it is the gradual fruit of many affections now merged and mellowed

into a natural piety. Indeed, we are able to frame our idea of the Deity on no other model. . . . There is perhaps no more frivolous notion than that a good, once attained, loses all its value. . . . We turn from a beautiful thing, as from a truth or a friend, only to return incessantly, and with increasing appreciation."

This, then, is the reason why we should read Mr Santayana, that we should clarify our aims, readjust our standards, and increase our capacity for appreciating the beautiful, for this is the royal road to the only happiness which is true, steadfast and eternal.

II

THE POEMS OF FRANCIS BRETT-YOUNG

READ but this one song:

"Why have you stolen my delight
In all the golden shows of spring
When every cherry-tree is white
And in the limes the thrushes sing,

O fickler than the April day,
O brighter than the golden broom,
O blyther than the thrushes' lay,
O whiter than the cherry-bloom,

O sweeter than all things that blow . . .
Why have you only left for me
The broom, the cherry's crown of snow,
And thrushes in the linden-tree?"

Is there any need of further reason?

One concedes to that at once a word not often unlocked from one's vocabulary; loveliness is implicit in it, music, harmony, beauty are all there. Alas! that we should have to search among so many heaps of rubble for one rich gem, but this at any rate is well-nigh flawless: for the rest, Mr Brett-Young has approached excellence, achieved haunting lines and oftentimes failed to arouse any emotional feeling at all. He talks of the lovely words that wander through his brain, but they frequently refuse to leave their refuge. He is at his best when he is most simple, as here:

"High on the tufted baobab-tree
To-night a rain-bird sang to me
A simple song, of three notes only,
That made the wilderness more lonely;

For in my brain it echoed nearly,
Old village church bells chiming clearly :
The sweet cracked bells, just out of tune,
Over the mowing grass in June—

Over the mowing grass, and meadows
Where the low sun casts long shadows,
And cuckoos call in the twilight
From elm to elm, in level flight.

Now through the evening meadows move
Slow couples of young folk in love,
Who pause at every crooked stile
And kiss in the hawthorn's shade the while :

Like pale moths the summer frocks
Hover between the beds of phlox,
And old men, feeling it is late,
Cease their gossip at the gate,

Till deeper still the twilight grows,
And night blossometh, like a rose
Full of love and sweet perfume,
Whose heart most tender stars illume.

Here the red sun sank like lead,
And the sky blackened overhead ;
Only the locust chirped at me
From the shadowy baobab-tree."

I don't deny that this trick of contrasting unpleasant existing conditions with pleasant conditions that surrounded one's past some time before was part of the stock-in-trade of every so-called war poet. I am not at all concerned to defend, nor am I interested in, the contrast. I merely chronicle the æsthetic pleasure that I derive from verses four and five, though neither of these even approaches perfection. But I do maintain that both the poems I have quoted are worth reading. I do maintain that Mr Brett-Young has the instinct of all true poets : he realises that "Beauty is an armour against fate,"

"that a lovely word is not an idle thing": he is a true lover of Beauty: listen to his confession of faith:

"Beauty and love are one,
Even when fierce war clashes:
Even when our fiery sun
Hath burnt itself to ashes,
And the dead planets race
Unlighted through blind space,
Beauty will still shine there:
Wherefore, I worship her."

He is, moreover, most successful when he invokes her:

"Whither, O my sweet mistress, must I follow thee?
For when I hear thy distant footfall nearing,
And wait on thy appearing,
Lo! my lips are silent: no words come to me.

Once I waylaid thee in green forest covers,
Hoping that spring might free my lips with gentle fingers;
Alas! her presence lingers
No longer than on the plain the shadow of brown kestrel hovers.

Through windless ways of the night my spirit followed after;—
Cold and remote were they, and there, possessed
By a strange unworldly rest,
Awaiting thy still voice heard only starry laughter.

The pillared halls of sleep echoed my ghostly tread.
Yet when their secret chambers I essayed
My spirit sank, dismayed,
Waking in fear to find the new-born vision fled.

Once indeed—but then my spirit bloomed in leafy rapture—
I loved; and once I looked death in the eyes:
So, suddenly made wise,
Spoke of such beauty as I may never recapture. . . .

Whither, O divine mistress, must I then follow thee ?
Is it only in love . . . say, is it only in death
That the spirit blossometh,
And words that may match my vision shall come to me ? "

It is because of these simple short poems that I like Mr Brett-Young's work : in his more ambitious and longer poems like *Thamar* he leaves me untouched. He cannot convey in words the mysterious mingled effect that the combined colour, music and movement of the Russian ballet produces on the mind.

Let him remain content with the soft, sweet simplicity of Prothalamion and we shall love him the more :

" When the evening came my love said to me :
Let us go into the garden now that the sky is cool,
The garden of black hellebore and rosemary,
Where wild woodruff spills in a milky pool.

Low we passed in the twilight, for the wavering heat
Of day had waned, and round that shaded plot
Of secret beauty the thickets clustered sweet ;
Here is heaven, our hearts whispered, but our lips spake not.

Between that old garden and seas of lazy foam
Gloomy and beautiful alleys of trees arise
With spire of cypress and dreamy beechen dome,
So dark that our enchanted sight knew nothing but the skies

Veiled with soft air, drench'd in the roses' musk
Or the dusky, dark carnation's breath of clove ;
No stars burned in their deeps, but through the dusk
I saw my love's eyes, and they were brimmed with love.

No star their secret ravished, no wasting moon
Mocked the sad transience of those eternal hours :
Only the soft, unseeing heaven of June,
The ghosts of great trees, and the sleeping flowers.

For doves that crooned in the leafy noonday now
Were silent; the night-jar sought his secret covers,
Nor even a mild sea-whisper moved a creaking bough—
Was ever a silence deeper made for lovers?

Was ever a moment meeter made for love?
Beautiful are your closed lips beneath my kiss;
And all your yielding sweetness beautiful—
Oh, never in all the world was such a night as this!"

III

THE POEMS OF IRIS TREE

IRIS TREE is worth reading for her vivacity, her hatred of shams, her intellectual fireworks, her simple love of the beautiful, her youthful rebellion, her sense of colour, her harmony, her humour, but most of all for this:

"Many things I'd find to charm you,
Books and scarves and silken socks,
All the seven rainbow colours,
Black and white with 'broidered clocks.
Then a stick of polished whalebone
And a coat of tawny fur,
And a row of gleaming bottles
Filled with rose-water and myrrh.
Rarest brandy of the 'fifties,
Old liqueurs in leather kegs,
Golden Sauterne, copper sherry
And a nest of plovers' eggs.
Toys of tortoise-shell and jasper,
Little boxes cut in jade;
Handkerchiefs of finest cambric,
Damask cloths and dim brocade,
Six musicians of the Magyar,
Madness making harmony;
And a bed austere and narrow
With a quilt from Barbary.
You shall have a bath of amber,
A Venetian looking-glass,
And a crimson-chested parrot
On a lawn of terraced grass.
Then a small Tanagra statue
Found anew in ruins old,
Or an azure plate from Persia,
Or my hair in plaits of gold;
Or my scalp that like an Indian

You shall carry for a purse,
Or my spilt blood in a goblet . . .
Or a volume of my verse."

If this doesn't make you rush out and buy her poems, nothing will. It is the topmost level of her achievement, and it is an achievement that even so musical a poet as Walter de la Mare would not be ashamed of having written. Where, I would know, has the love of little material things been so deliciously, so naïvely confessed by any other poet? Listen to her in rebellious mood:

"You preach to me of laws, you tie my limbs
With rights and wrongs and arguments of good,
You choke my song and fill my mouth with hymns,
You stop my heart and turn it into wood.

I serve not God, but make my idol fair
From clay of brown earth, painted bright with blood,
Dressed in sweet flesh and wonder of wild hair
By Beauty's fingers to her changing mood.

The long line of the sea, the straight horizon,
The toss of flowers, the prance of milky feet,
And moonlight clear as grass my great religion,
And sunrise falling on the quiet street.

The coloured crowd, the unrestrained, the gay,
And lovers in the secret sheets of night
Trembling like instruments of music, till the day
Stands marvelling at their sleeping bodies white."

Here, surely, is that love of beauty, finely expressed, which is the first thing we look for in any true poet. She invokes the aid of her "three musketeers of faithful following," Love, Humour and Rebellion, and these three stalwarts never desert her, and one finds oneself wishing that some other poets had had the good sense to recruit the services of such helpful henchmen.

Especially pleasant is it to find that she has not yet outgrown her youthful pessimism: once youth has

passed, time cries for self-expression in other ways than these :

"There are songs enough of love, of joy, of grief :
Roads to the sunset, alleys to the moon :
Poems of the red rose and the golden leaf,
Fantastic faery and gay ballad tune.

The long road unto nothing I will sing,
Sing on one note, monotonous and dry,
Of sameness, calmness and the years that bring
No more emotion than the fear to die.

Grey house, grey house and after that grey house,
Another house as grey and steep and still :
An old cat tired of playing with a mouse,
A sick child tired of chasing down the hill."

There are nothing like enough songs of love or of joy, and no one knows that better than Iris Tree, but Youth loves to drench itself in hopeless greyness, if only to run through the whole gamut of human emotions, "just for fun." It is like a child's dressing up in a myriad different costumes :

"I see myself in many different dresses . . .
I see myself the child of many races,
Poisoners, martyrs, harlots and princesses ;
Within my soul a thousand weary traces
Of pain and joy and passionate excesses. . . ."

Much more significant of maturity is her bizarre *Sonnet for Would-be Suicides* (that is my title for it, not hers) :

"How often, when the thought of suicide
With ghostly weapon beckons us to die,
The ghosts of many foods alluring glide
On golden dishes, wine in purple tide
To drown our whim. Things danced before the eye
Like tasselled grapes to Tantalus : the sly
Blue of a curling trout, the battened pride
Of ham in frills, complacent quails that lie
Resigned to death like heroes—July peas,

Expectant bottles foaming at the brink—
White bread, and honey of the golden bees—
A peach with velvet coat, some prawns in pink,
A slice of beef carved deftly, Stilton cheese,
And cups where berries float and bubbles wink."

One at least of her faithful musketeers has served her to excellent purpose in this eminently philosophical poem. Uncle Max's eyes must twinkle with sheer merriment every time he reads this: it must be pleasant to have a niece so capable of profiting by his genius. Another friend of the family, Rupert Brooke, must have appreciated the panegyric on Worms. He may have directly inspired it:

"Mouth of the dust I kiss, corruption absolute,
Worm, that shall come at last to be my paramour,
Envenomed, unseen wanderer who alone is mute,
Yet greater than gods or heroes that have gone before.

For you I sheave the harvest of my hair,
For you the whiteness of my flesh, my passion's valour,
For you I throw upon the grey screen of the air
My prism-like conceptions, my gigantic colour.

For you the delicate hands that fashion to make great
Clay, and white paper, plant a tongue in silence,
For you the battle-frenzy, and the might of hate,
Science for giving wounds, and healing science.

For you the heart's wild love, beauty, long care,
Virginity, passionate womanhood, perfected wholeness,
For you the unborn child that I prepare,
You, flabby, boneless, brainless, senseless, soulless!"

More childishness, but how delightful, how exactly in the spirit of Donne.

One string on which she continually harps is found most lucidly expressed in this stanza:

"Loneliness I love,
And that is why they have called me forth into the streets.
Loneliness I love,
But the crowd has clutched at me with fawning hands . .

My spirit speaks
In the scented quietness of a divine melancholy
Murmuring the tunes
For which my dreams are the delicate instruments.
The shadowy silences
Have made me beautiful and dressed me in velvet dignities,
And that is why
The noise of the tambourines has maddened my soul into dancing,
And I am clad
In the lust-lipped whispering of future caresses,
Holiness I love,
And touching the virginal pierced feet of martyrs,
The crucified feet
Nestled among lilies and hallowing candles.
Holiness I love
And the melodious absolution falling on my sins.
But that is why
Blasphemous priests have forced my hands to tear
The vesture of secrecy
Which hides the human nakedness of God."

That is a very definitely true cry from the depths and it is oft-repeated.

"To fashion for my love one perfect song" has been ever her aim, but her generation has been too much for her.

"Subconscious visions hold us and we fashion
Delirious verses, tortured statues, spasms of paint,
Make cryptic perorations of complaint,
Inverted religion, and perverted passion."

This may not be good poetry, but it is an admirably concise epitaph of the age.

Sometimes she escapes into riotous, wanton imagery as a refuge:

"Moonlight flows over me,
Spreads her bright, watery hair over my face,
Full of illicit, marvellous perfumes
Wreathed with syringa, and plaited with hyacinths;
Hair of the moonlight falling about me,
Straight and cool as the drooping tresses of rain."

But in the end she comes back, gloriously sure of herself, in a poem which is worthy to stand by the one I first quoted:

"I know what happiness is—
It is the negation of thought,
The shutting off
Of all those brooding phantoms that surround
As dank trees in a forest
Cutting the daylight into rags,
Caging the sun
In rusted prison bars.
Happiness loves to lie at a river's edge
And make no song,
But listen to the water's murmuring wisdom,
The kissing touch of leaves wind-bowed together,
The feathery swish of cloud wings on a hill:
Opening wide the violet-petalled doors
Of every shy and cloistered sense,
That all the scent and music of the world
May rush into the soul.
And happiness expands
The rainbow arch for a procession of dreams,
For moth-like fancies winged with evening,
For dove-breasted silences,
For shadowy reveries
And starry pilgrims . . .
I know what happiness is—
It is the giving back to Earth
Of all our furtive thefts,
The lurid jewels that we stole away
From passion, sin and pain,
Because they glittered strangely, luring us
With their forbidden beauty.
Because our childish fingers curiously
Crave the pale secrets of the moon
And grope for dangerous toys.
Happiness comes in giving back to Earth
The things we took from her with violent hands,
Remembering only
That her dust is our garment,
Her fruits our endeavour,

Her waters our priestess,
Her leaves our interpreters to God,
Her hills our infinite patience."

That is a brave cry: "I know what happiness is." Happy indeed is the man or woman who has found this elixir of life—thrice happy is the poet who not only has found it, but is able to give exact and musical expression to the discovery. Iris Tree has matured: we watch her in the process of discarding her childish things. . . . When next we read her we shall find a full-fledged poet. There is earnest already of great things to come. That is why we should read her now. To watch a poet try her wings, soar and fall, only to soar again, is to be counted one of life's finer joys.

IV

THE POEMS OF ALDOUS HUXLEY

WE read Aldous Huxley because we see in his work another real poet in embryo, but a poet working in as different a medium from that in which Iris Tree works as it is possible to imagine. He has been called the "neurasthenic Rabelais of 1920," and in so far as this connotes a perversity of intellect it is an accurate label. For there is no getting away from the cleverness of Mr Huxley: he is almost too intellectual. His brain, which helps him so admirably in his short stories, acts as an obstruction in his pursuit of beauty.

"The problem which the most authentic modern poetry is endeavouring to solve is to give beauty a fuller content by exploring unfamiliar paths of sensation and perception," but Mr Huxley most nearly approximates to beauty when he is most familiar. It is perhaps permissible to doubt whether these new, unfamiliar paths can lead anywhere but to cul-de-sac or cesspool.

At any rate, in Mr Huxley's opinion, "Your centaurs are your only poets." He finds beauty "no far-fetched, dear-bought gem; no pomander to be smelt only when the crowd becomes too stinkingly insistent: it is not a birth of rare oboes or violins, not visible only from ten to six by state permission at a nominal charge, not a thing richly apart, but an ethic, a way of belief and of practice, of faith and works, medieval in its implication with the very threads of life." He desires "no Paphian cloister of pink monks. Rather a rosy Brotherhood of Common Life, eating, drinking; marrying and giving in marriage; taking and taken in adultery; reading, thinking, and when thinking fails, feeling immeasurably more subtly, sometimes perhaps creating."

So much for his theory: in practice he has given us many tentative exercises which reek of the intellectual, are rich in humour, deadly in their irony, and one long poem, *Leda*, which has much beauty (though it has been

called the beauty of self-indulgence rather than that pure beauty of self-discipline), and passages of surprising ugliness. Whenever a poet seeks to retell a well-known story, like Keats in *Endymion* and *Hyperion*, we invariably find ourselves comparing the effect with that which a parson gives when he translates a Biblical fable into the modern jargon which passes for English prose in the pulpit.

In the latter case we shiver with disgust; in the former it is the test of the poet's genius that we are uplifted and find the original vastly improved by the fresh treatment.

Mr Brett-Young does nothing to improve our impression of Thamar, Mr Huxley infuses into the old story of *Leda* a thousand new concepts. Let your mind dwell on this picture:

"The tunic falls about her feet, and she
Steps from the crocus folds of drapery,
Dazzlingly naked, into the warm sun.
God-like she stood; then broke into a run,
Leaping and laughing in the light, as though
Life through her veins coursed with so swift a flow
Of generous blood and fire that to remain
Too long in statued queenliness were pain
To that quick soul, avid of speed and joy.
She ran, easily bounding, like a boy, . . .
Narrow of haunch and slim and firm of breast.
Lovelier she seemed in motion than at rest,
If that might be, when she was never less,
Moving or still, than perfect loveliness."

Small wonder that Jove, scourged by his libido with itching memories of bliss, should turn his sickened sight from the monstrous shapes that met his eyes in Africa (this is the passage of surpassing ugliness) where

"Among unthinkable flowers, they pause and grin
Out through a trellis of suppurating lips,
Of mottled tentacles barbed at the tips
And bloated hands and wattles and red lobes
Of pendulous gristle and enormous probes
Of pink and slashed and tasselled flesh"

to young Leda where she stood, poised on the river-side. Straightway his heart held but one thought: he must possess that perfect form or die. Have her he must:

"Gods, men, earth, heaven, the whole
Vast universe was blotted from his thought
And nought remained but Leda's laughter, nought
But Leda's eyes. Magnified by his lust,
She was the whole world now; have her he must, he must. . . ."

He goes to Aphrodite to plan the rape

". . . While she,
Who was to be their victim, joyously
Laughed like a child in the sudden breathless chill
And splashed and swam, forgetting every ill
And every fear and all, save only this:
That she was young, and it was perfect bliss
To be alive where suns so goldenly shine,
And bees go drunk with fragrant honey-wine,
And the cicadas sing from morn till night,
And rivers run so cool and pure and bright . . .
Stretched all her length, arms under head, she lay
In the deep grass, while the sun kissed away
The drops that sleeked her skin. Slender and fine
As those old images of the gods that shine
With smooth-worn silver, polished through the years
By the touching lips of countless worshippers,
Her body was; and the sun's golden heat
Clothed her in softest flame from head to feet
And was her mantle, that she scarcely knew
The conscious sense of nakedness. The blue,
Far hills and the faint fingers of the sky
Shimmered and pulsed in the heat uneasily,
And hidden in the grass, cicadas shrill
Dizzied the air with ceaseless noise, until
A listener might wonder if they cried
In his own head or in the world outside."

Lazily she looks up into the sky and sees there the conflict between the eagle and her lovely, hapless swan. Pity (the mother of voluptuousness) is roused in Leda's heart and she opens her arms to receive the transformed god.

"Crouched on the flowery ground
Young Leda lay, and to her side did press
The swan's proud-arching opulent loveliness . . .
Closer he nestled, mingling with the slim
Austerity of virginal flank and limb
His curved and florid beauty, till she felt
That downy warmth strike through her flesh and melt
The bones and marrow of her strength away. . . .
And over her the swan shook slowly free
The folded glory of his wings, and made
A white-walled tent of soft and luminous shade
To be her veil and keep her from the shame
Of naked light and the sun's noonday flame.

Hushed lay the earth and the wide, careless sky.
Then one sharp sound, that might have been a cry
Of utmost pleasure or of utmost pain,
Broke sobbing forth, and all was still again."

There is a sensuous beauty in this poem which makes it altogether lovely. Certainly in thinking of the fable of Leda in the future our minds will first fly back to Mr Huxley's poem and that is probably the highest tribute we can pay it. But the rest of his poems aim at something very different from the simple, sensuous and passionate and are on a different plane.

He deals cynically with the transitory nature of human passions, he laughs at Jonah as he sits praying and singing on "the convex mound of one vast kidney" of the whale that swallowed him; in his philosophers' songs he likes to sing of man as "a poor degenerate from the ape" and of God as a fool.

"If, O my Lesbia, I should commit,
Not fornication, dear, but suicide,
My Thames-blown body (Pliny vouches it)
Would drift face upwards on the oily tide
With the other garbage, till it putrefied.

But you, if all your lovers' frozen hearts
Conspired to send you, desperate, to drown—
Your maiden modesty would float face down,
And men would weep upon your hinder parts.

'Tis the Lord's doing. Marvellous is the plan
By which this best of worlds is wisely planned.
One law he made for woman, one for man :
We bow the head and do not understand."

This is certainly not poetry, but it is funny. The man with the wry face gets his laugh, even if we feel that to be facetious it is not necessary to be blasphemous.

He is happier in his rôle of Ninth Philosopher : he here attains a true expression of what is happening in the world of modern art.

"Beauty for some provides escape,
Who gain a happiness in eyeing
The gorgeous buttocks of the ape
Or Autumn sunsets exquisitely dying."

But *Frascati's* shows him at his normal level of intellectual irony :

"Bubble-breasted swells the dome
Of this my spiritual home,
From whose nave the chandelier,
Schaffhausen frozen, tumbles sheer.
We in the round balcony sit,
Lean o'er and look into the pit
Where feed the human bears beneath,
Champing with their gilded teeth.
What negroid holiday makes free
With such priapic revelry ?
What songs ? What gongs ? What nameless rites ?
What gods like wooden stalagmites ?
What stream of blood or kidney pie ?
What blasts of Bantu melody ?
Rag-time. . . . But when the wearied Band
Swoons to a waltz, I take her hand.
And there we sit in blissful calm,
Quietly sweating palm to palm."

This is the vein which he expands in what Middleton Murry regards as his best poem, *Soles Occidere et Redire Possunt*, an attempt to "fish up a single day" from a dead

friend's forgotten existence. John Ridley, as he calls him, wakes from a dream among his familiar books and pictures

"Real as his dream? He wondered. Ten to nine.
Thursday. Wasn't he lunching at his aunt's?
Distressing circumstance.
But then he was taking Jenny out to dine,
Which was some consolation. What a chin!
Civilised ten thousand years, and still
No better way than rasping a pale mask
With imminent suicide, steel or obsidian:
Repulsive task!
And the more odious for being quotidian.
If one should live till eighty-five . . .
And the dead, do they still shave? The horrible dead, are they alive? . . .
Nine o'clock. Still in bed. Warm, but how lonely!
He wept to think of all those single beds,
Those desperate night-long solitudes,
Those mental salons full of nudes.
Shelley was great when he was twenty-four.
Eight thousand nights alone—minus, perhaps,
Six, or no! seven, certainly not more.
Five little bits of heaven
(Tum-do-rum, de-rum, de-rum),
Five little bits of heaven and one that was a lapse,
High-priced disgust: it stopped him suddenly
In the midst of laughter and talk with a tingling down the spine
(Like infants' impoliteness, a terrible infants' brightness),
And he would shut his eyes so as not to see
His own hot blushes calling him a swine."

At last he throws the nightmare of his blankets off, gets up and goes into the bathroom—

"Pitiable to be
Quite so deplorably naked when one strips.
There was his scar, a panel of old rose
Slashed in the elegant buff of his trunk hose;

Adonis punctured by his amorous boar,
Permanent souvenir of the Great War.
One of God's jokes, typically good,
That wound of his. How perfect that he should
Have suffered it for—what ? "

He dresses, goes down to breakfast, letters and *The Times*: he reads some of his old work . . .

"Yes, he had genius, if he chose to use it ;
If he chose to—but it was too much trouble,
And he preferred reading. He lit his pipe,
Opened his book, plunged in and soon was drowned
In pleasant seas . . . to rise again and find
One o'clock struck and his unshaven face
Still like a record in a musical-box,
And Auntie Loo miles off in Bloomsbury."

Mr Huxley wastes much satire on avuncular energies in war-time and makes his hero escape from his verbose relatives to walk the streets. Tired of this, he enters the inevitable café of the intellectual young novelist and moralises on the nightmare oppressiveness of profane love. He then sits out in the gardens of Leicester Square and finds comfort in regarding each hair and every pore on his hand. This palls soon enough, as one might expect, and then—

"Action, action ! Quickly rise and do
The most irreparable things ; beget,
In one brief consummation of the will,
Remorse, reaction, wretchedness, regret.
Action ! This was no time for sitting still.
He crushed his hat down over his eyes
And walked with a stamp to symbolise
Action, action—left, right, left ;
Planting his feet with flabby beat,
Taking strange Procrustean steps,
Lengthened, shortened to avoid
Touching the lines between the stones—
A thing which makes God so annoyed."

Action translates itself into spending three pounds on a book which he didn't want and pulling the bell of a chance house. He turns into a cinema house, goes to sleep, wakes at eight o'clock and so keeps "dear Jenny" waiting.

This dinner with Jenny is the most effective part of the poem, as we might expect:

"Food and drink, food and drink:
Olives as firm and sleek and green
As the breasts of a sea-god's daughter,
Swimming far down where the corpses sink
Through the dense shadowy water.
Silver and black on flank and back,
The glossy sardine mourns its head.
The red anchovy and the beetroot red,
With carrots, build a gorgeous stair—
Bronze, apoplexy and Venetian hair—
And the green pallor of the salad round
Sharpens their clarion sound. . . .
Golden wine, pale as a Tuscan primitive,
And wine's strange taste, half loathsome, half delicious:
Come, my Lesbia, let us love and live. . . .
'Jenny, adorable—' (what draws the line
At the mere word 'love'?) 'has anyone the right
To look so lovely as you look to-night,
To have such eyes, such a helmet of bright hair?'
But candidly, he wondered, do I care?"

The night goes on, comes the time to part—

"'Good-night,' the last kiss, 'and God bless you, my dear.'
So, she was gone, she who had been so near,
So breathing-warm—soft mouth and hands and hair—
A moment since. Had she been really there,
Close at his side and had he kissed her? It seemed
Unlikely as something somebody else had dreamed
And talked about at breakfast, being a bore."

The first thing we feel tempted to say about this poem is that we should vastly prefer to be possessed of an Olympian libido for Leda than to be burdened with John

Ridley's "feebly sceptical, inefficient, profoundly unhappy" emotion for Jenny. Jove was, at any rate, healthy in his lusts: there is something terribly anæmic about our modern love-making, with our one eye on the intellect lest we should do anything without a reason. I am fully aware that this is not criticism: it is merely making a note of the feeling that is uppermost in our minds on finishing the poem. But that is one of the reasons why we should read Aldous Huxley: he is not lacking in daring: what he sees and feels he shows: he is very boyish in his desire to shock: in these days one would have thought that there was no one left to shock except the undergraduate, and those who preserve the callowness of the undergraduate through life. He exaggerates the importance of material joys and miseries: he is easily disgusted: his fastidious intellect rebels at many things that most of us accept complacently . . . but it is to his credit that he makes us feel that we ought to be more fastidious, that we ought to think more, that we ought to accept less. At present he is engaged in the process of destruction, a joyous, youthful pastime: when he grows up he will give us something constructive. At present we rejoice in his vitality, energy and alertness. The rest will come. Above all, he is generously endowed with the comic spirit: that alone would make him readable in such an age of dullness.

V

THE POEMS OF ROBERT GRAVES

THERE are not many reasons why we should read Robert Graves, but one reason is of such outstanding importance that it overshadows the want of many. While Siegfried Sassoon and Osbert Sitwell have vented their vitriol on the old, Mr Graves in *Country Sentiment* has run away into the land of nursery rhymes as an escape from the haunting horrors of our post-war era. There are strong men of little imagination who have wiped off the memory of the war from their minds like chalk-marks off a slate: there are others who will be haunted by it for the rest of their lives. Robert Graves is one of the latter:

> "Gulp down your wine, old friends of mine,
> Roar through the darkness, stamp and sing
> And lay ghost hands on everything,
> But leave the noonday's warm sunshine
> To living lads for mirth and wine.
>
> I met you suddenly down the street,
> Strangers assume your phantom faces,
> You grin at me from daylight places,
> Dead, long dead, I'm ashamed to greet
> Dead men down the morning street."

That is why he prays that

> "The gift of heavenly peace
> And glory for all time
> [May] Keep the boy Tom who tending geese
> First made the nursery rhyme."

Only in the contemplation of childish toys can he regain repose. But nursery rhymes and childish toys are as flimsy as gossamer, the latter too easily get broken, the former are too often patently absurd,

There is a gnat-like thinness even in this delicious little song:

"Small gnats that fly
In hot July
And lodge in sleeping ears,
Can rouse therein
A trumpet's din
With Day-of-Judgment fears.

Small mice at night
Can wake more fright
Than lions at midday.
An urchin small
Torments us all
Who tread his prickly way.

A straw will crack
The camel's back,
To die we need but sip,
So little sand
As fills the hand
Can stop a steaming ship.

One smile relieves
A heart that grieves
Though deadly sad it be,
And one hard look
Can close the book
That lovers love to see."

He listens to the pale-bearded Janus, who urges him to

"Sing and laugh and easily run
Through the wide waters of my plain,
Bathe in my waters, drink my sun,
And draw my creatures with soft song;
They shall follow you along
Graciously with no doubt or pain."

So he extols the simple rhymes that we learnt in childhood's days and seeks to add to them.

"So these same rhymes shall still be told
To children yet unborn,
While false philosophy growing old
Fades and is killed by scorn."

Unfortunately it is not given to any modern to imitate with any degree of success either the ballads our ancestors loved or the nursery rhymes which all children have learnt: this age is too sophisticated and this avenue of escape is denied to Mr Graves: one of the lessons that we find most painful in the learning is that we are the product of our own age and cannot get away from it. Mr Graves anticipates his reviewers in his *L'Envoi* when he says:

"Everything they took from my new poem book
But the fly-leaf and the covers."

But there are one or two other things I should leave inside the singularly attractive covers, and one of them is this:

"Restless and hot two children lay
Plagued with uneasy dreams,
Each wandered lonely through false day
A twilight torn with screams.

True to the bed-time story, Ben
Pursued his wounded bear,
Ann dreamed of chattering monkey men,
Of snakes twined in her hair . . .

Now high aloft above the town
The thick clouds gather and break,
A flash, a roar, and rain drives down:
Aghast the young things wake.

Trembling for what their terror was,
Surprised by instant doom,
With lightning in the looking-glass,
Thunder that rocks the room.

The monkey's paws patter again,
Snakes hiss and flash their eyes :
The bear roars out in hideous pain :
Ann prays and her brother cries.

They cannot guess, could not be told
How soon comes careless day,
With birds and dandelion gold,
Wet grass, cool scents of May."

This is no nursery rhyme, but it is a very important parable. Mr Robert Graves is by nature a poet, but his vision has become blurred, his senses distorted, his nerves jangled by the war. Can no one tell him of the approach of careless day, of birds and dandelion gold, wet grass, cool scents of May ? Surely the nightmare of his soul is nearly over, and he can creep out from under the soft quilt of nursery rhymes to the clear light of day and sing us the golden songs that we know are in him, as yet unexpressed.

VI

J. D. BERESFORD

A COMMON criticism levelled against novelists is that when they depict failures we find it unnecessary to turn to the last page to prove these failures successes. No novelist except Gissing has dared to write the story of a failure who remained a failure till the end. Mr J. D. Beresford's art is frankly autobiographical, and the very fact of his having a novel published proves that he at any rate has ceased to be a failure, and yet the fact is that Jacob Stahl at each stage of his life looks upon himself as a failure; the truth of the matter is that Mr Beresford, like his hero, fully realises that "virtue lies only in the continual renewal of effort; the boast of success is an admission of failure." Jacob never boasts of success.

In *W. E. Ford* Mr Beresford talks of his architectural experiences, his unfortunate first marriage, his temporary inhibitions and his ultimate literary success; his hero in the trilogy is just such a man as Mr Beresford declares himself to be. Jacob Stahl was lame, Mr Beresford suffers from a like physical disability. At every point in these three books we feel convinced that he is setting down the facts of his own struggle, and if it needed proof that genius does not necessarily manifest itself through the imagination, but through a careful selection of actual autobiographical experiences, we should get that proof in these remarkable novels. He even goes so far as to interpolate into the body of his novels the actual eulogistic criticism that his own early works received from the reviewers. We know that he was actually employed by W. H. Smith & Son to do much the same work as Jacob Stahl is called upon to do for Price & Mallinson.

A conversation with Meredith that Jacob has on the subject of literary art is equally illuminating as descriptive of Beresford's own theories. "Why shouldn't a novelist describe life as he sees it? . . . I simply don't understand all that stuff about art," replied Jacob. "Method,

technique, yes. You have got to find words to express what you've seen." He agreed that the essential thing was the accurate representation of the commonplace, and realised when it was put to him that he had put a piece of life under the microscope and not related it to the whole; we feel, furthermore, that Mr Beresford was thinking solely of himself when he impressed upon us the importance of realising that at the end of his struggle Jacob Stahl "could never rest content with any such attainment as was provided by the comfort of his wife's love . . . in the care of his three children, or, least of all, by such satisfactions as come to him from his modest achievements in the world of letters; he is ever at the beginning of life reaching out towards those eternal values that are ever beyond his grasp . . . and that earnest search of his for some aspect of permanent truth keeps his spirit young." Mr Beresford is pre-eminently among the novelists of to-day a candidate for truth. Surely no one has been so completely honest over his relations with the other sex; it is true that in *God's Counterpoint* Philip is so puritanically distorted in his attitude towards sex as to become as vile and disgusting as the most degenerate physical profligate, and we feel that a more normal man than Mr Beresford's hero (the shadow of himself) in the trilogy would not have taken Madeline so seriously or have believed in, much less have married, such a woman as Lola so casually, or have caused such a perfect type of womanhood as Betty so many heart-burnings. Anyone but Jacob would have seen through Mrs Latimer in half-an-hour. It would have served Jacob right if she had made him marry her. At the same time a more normal man than Mr Beresford would have been quite unable to make such people not only live but actually interesting, not so much for what they do as for what they are as betrayed in their conversations; an underbred clerk, a temporarily reclaimed drunkard of a curate, a courtesan countess, a saviour of souls, a self-sacrificing aunt, a pedantic successful brother, a woman of the streets, whist-playing inhabitants of a boarding-house, literary giants, omniscient commercial travellers, pretty typists, truculent compositors, Cornish villagers, flit in and out of the pages of the trilogy, who, once met, can never be forgotten. They are all flesh and

blood. These two perfect cameos of psychological analysis may be taken as typical:

"When Laurence's brain grew dull and futile after a period of clean living and close application, he could find no stimulus for it save by a concession to the brute in him. When the brute was tired by excess, it found rest and the means of recovery during the activity and temporary dominance of the spirit. . . . If he had lived for the spirit he would have died in a madhouse, as it was the brute gradually absorbed him."

Again, of Cecil Barker: "Truly, the man was honest when he was not fishing (for the souls of men). He could beget love for himself in the mind of man or woman; and he could reject it without compunction when offered—a far harder thing. . . . He was only selfish in the rigour of his self-denial . . . he was a superman who worked for no rewards here, and none ever heard him speak of any hope of reward hereafter. . . . Even those who—like Jacob Stahl—suffered bitterly at his hands, still remembered him in after years with admiration and love."

The fact is that in common with all true artists Mr Beresford (like his hero) was extraordinarily impressionable, and therefore saw further into the hearts of men than most of us, even if, as he says of himself, he resembled rubber rather than wax in that he was only impressed momentarily. But his resilience is opposed to the woodenness of ordinary writers in exactly the same proportion as his protagonists have as much likeness to life as theirs have none.

One of the most pleasing traits in Mr Beresford's work comes from what he calls his "scattered education"; there is always in his work a pleasing absence of mere cleverness which endears him to all those who regard life as less of an intellectual problem than something which every man has to live for himself; we are shown in one page of absorbing interest how books affected the life of Jacob Stahl; from standard novels of which *Robert Elsmere* may be taken as a typical example he rises to the *Origin of Species*, works on biology, physics and philosophy; only after his life with the swearing mission parson, Cecil Barker (an exquisitely drawn character), does he realise the shortcomings of orthodox Christianity and the fact that experience is the only school that matters; he

feels quite honestly ignorant in the presence of his brother as he does in the presence of all so-called "well-read" men. He owed more to his financial and marital disasters than to anything else in his life except the influence of Betty; by inclination he was tempted to deny God through his foolish tendency to immolate himself. Only when he got clear of cant, from a morality that depended on repression to one that depended upon the liberation of impulse, did he achieve freedom and success. Mr Beresford, it will be seen at once, by presenting us with a slice of life (unconsciously perhaps) teaches us how to live. Like Wells, he becomes more and more interested as life goes on in linking up science, religion and art; the unity of life, the beauty of truth, the truth of beauty, these are the things at which he aims; the methods by which he would attain them are best presented to us in his educational experiment, *W. E. Ford.* There in the shortest possible compass we get the trend of his teaching, for like all great artists he is first and foremost a teacher; and if his own observations have taught him nothing else, they have at any rate taught him "that a positive immorality (as we now regard it) is a far more admirable thing than a negative virtue." It would be hard to ask a man to give a more convincing proof than the results of his own observations, especially when he can express them, as Mr Beresford does, with subtle irony, genial humour and an uncanny knowledge of the motives which govern human action.

VII

NIGHT AND DAY

THERE is one thing that Virginia Woolf demands of all her readers before she can be appreciated at her true worth, and that is leisure. Try to read *Night and Day* at the rate you read W. J. Locke and you will hear a faint buzz of conversation amid an interminable rattle of tea-cups . . . and nothing more. For it is certainly true that people in this novel rarely stop talking, and it is equally true that when they do stop it is usually to have another cup of tea with a thin slice of lemon in it. It treats on the one side of a type that one finds "at the tops of professions, with letters after their names"; sitting "in luxurious public offices, with private secretaries attached to them"; writing "solid books in dark covers, issued by the presses of the two great universities"; and "when one of them dies the chances are that another of them writes his biography."

The heroine's mother spent her life in making phrases and adding to the monumental biography of her poet father, while Katherine, the daughter, rose early in the morning or sat up late at night to work at mathematics, a subject that appealed to her solely because it was opposed to literature.

As a foil to Katherine is Mary Datchet, the twenty-five-year-old parson's daughter living alone in London, enjoying Emerson and the darning of stockings, while earning her own living in a suffrage office in Russell Square. The two main male characters are also sharply differentiated.

There is William Rodney, who reads papers on the Elizabethan use of metaphors, irresistibly ludicrous in appearance, with his nervous, impulsive manners and immaculate clothes. "By profession a clerk in a Government office, he was one of those martyred spirits to whom literature is at once a source of divine joy and of almost intolerable irritation. Not content to rest in their love of it, they must attempt to practise it themselves, and they

are generally endowed with very little facility in composition." This man is engaged to Katherine though ten years her senior and "with more of the old maid in him than poet."

Ralph Denham, the other man of importance, is a rough-tongued, poor solicitor with an uncanny power of making people do what he wanted (especially the two girls in the novel), who lived in a very different style from that to which Katherine was accustomed. Here is a delightful description of the Hilbery *ménage*:

"They were all dressed for dinner, and, indeed, the prettiness of the dinner-table merited that compliment. There was no cloth upon the table, and the china made regular circles of deep blue upon the shining brown wood. In the middle there was a bowl of tawny red and yellow chrysanthemums, and one of pure white, so fresh that the narrow petals were curved backwards into a firm white ball. From the surrounding walls the heads of three famous Victorian writers surveyed this entertainment, and slips of paper pasted beneath them testified in the great man's own handwriting that he was always yours sincerely or affectionately or for ever"—from which it appears that Virginia Woolf is one of those writers who, interested in every thing, observe and note every detail in their work. "Daily life in a house where there are young and old is full of curious little ceremonies and pieties, which are discharged quite punctually, though the meaning of them is obscure, and a mystery has come to brood over them which lends even a superstitious charm to their performance." Every evening, for instance, we hear of Katherine reading aloud while her mother knitted scarves intermittently on a little circular frame, and her father read the newspaper, "not so attentively but that he could comment humorously now and again upon the fortunes of the hero and the heroine."

Her father spent his days editing his review or "placing together documents by means of which it would be proved that Shelley had written 'of' instead of 'and,' or that the inn in which Byron had slept was called the 'Nag's Head' and not the 'Turkish Knight,' or that the Christian name of Keats's uncle had been John rather than Richard."

He represents the opposite pole from Ralph Denham, the seemingly hard and self-sufficient young man with the queer temper, consumed with a desire to get on, unpopular both in the office and at home.

One of the charms of the book lies in the setting. We are swept from Lincoln's Inn Fields and Kensington to country rectories and manor houses in Lincolnshire where everything is reminiscent of the Middle Ages. It is in this country that the main characters find themselves. Ralph finds himself in love with Katherine; Katherine finds herself out of love with Rodney, to whom she is engaged, and in love with Ralph; Mary finds herself in love with Ralph; Rodney finds that nobody loves him: there are incomprehensible confusions in the minds of all the characters about love: but most of them are honest enough not only to realise their confusions, but to confess them. They begin to doubt their loves when they are in each other's presences, and be certain of them when they are again alone.

It is this finding of themselves that makes them interesting, for they are not, on the whole, lovable characters. One feels sorry for them, yes, and it is probable that Virginia Woolf herself loves them, but we feel that they are all shut away in a world which is far from ours. Over and over again we find ourselves enveloped in a Jane Austenish atmosphere, partly induced, no doubt, by the extreme deliberation of the writer. Virginia Woolf is in no hurry to arrive at any conclusion. Perhaps it is a virtue in her that we feel that reason will always triumph over the heart in these people. Perhaps it should, but it surely depends on the height of the passion to which the heart is capable of rising. In none of these characters is there any very explosive property.

Katherine's attempt to reconcile the world of reality with the dream world is not fairly portrayed, for the simple reason that her dream world is always such a thin one. Ralph Denham embodies for her the lover on the great horse riding by the seashore and the leaf-hung forests, but beyond the fact that he paces up and down the streets outside her windows for two nights he gives no indications of the great lover. The truth is that we are never allowed to see at all clearly into Katherine's or Ralph's dream

world. Virginia Woolf may have found herself incapable of taking us into its recesses : in the world of reality she is wonderful. It gives the whole of the book away when we find that we are more interested in the purely ineffective characters, like Mrs Hilbery, than in Katherine, who ought to have been a tragic character. "It's life that matters, nothing but life—the process of discovering, the everlasting and perpetual process," quotes Katherine to herself, "not the discovery itself at all." When one of Hugh Walpole's heroines begins to say things like that to herself we know that she is going to suffer incredible anguish in the process, but Katherine suffers nothing worse than having to listen to the gossip of an aunt who tells her that her *fiancé* (with whom she is not in love) has been flirting with another girl. Katherine ought to have been a discarded mistress at least. We feel cheated.

But we don't feel cheated when we listen to the author describing trivial people or a beautiful scene. Just as she is able to see and describe whatever emotions and ideas flit through the souls of her characters, so she can see and describe with equal skill and beauty and exactness the country fields of Lincolnshire, Kew Gardens, London by night, the river and interiors of houses.

We do feel cheated when Katherine has visions such as the following . . . and nothing comes of them :—

"She was walking down a road in Northumberland in the August sunset ; at the inn she left her companion, who was Ralph Denham, and was transported, not so much by her own feet as by some invisible means, to the top of a high hill. Here the scents, the sounds among the dry heather-roots, the grass-blades pressed upon the palm of her hand, were all so perceptible that she could experience each one separately. After this her mind made excursions into the dark of the air, or settled upon the surface of the sea, which could be discovered over there, or with equal unreason it returned to its couch of bracken beneath the stars of midnight, and visited the snow valleys of the moon. These fancies would have been in no way strange, since the walls of every mind are decorated with some such tracery, but she found herself suddenly pursuing such thoughts with an extreme ardour, which became a desire to change

her actual condition for something matching the conditions of her dream."

Unfortunately there is nothing in Ralph Denham to make him the object of such an ardour, unless his brusque way of trying to bully people of less mental calibre than himself makes him a heroic figure.

"I suppose I'm in love," he says to Mary, who is herself madly in love with him and he knows it. "Anyway, I'm out of my mind. I can't think, I can't work, I don't care a hang for anything in the world. Good heavens, Mary! I'm in torment! One moment I'm happy; next I'm miserable. I hate her for half-an-hour; then I'd give my whole life to be with her for ten minutes; all the time I don't know what I feel, or why I feel it; it's insanity, and yet it's perfectly reasonable."

Whatever he felt he had no right to talk to her of all women like that. This is no rider from the sea on a great horse, but as ineffectual and contemptible a creature as the pedant, Rodney. He actually sets before him on his table a note from Katherine, a flower he had picked for her, a photograph of a statue of a Greek goddess which (if the lower part were concealed!) had often given him the ecstasy of being in her presence and then sets himself to visualise her.

No, Ralph Denham is not calculated to inspire our affection, respect or love. It is more pleasant to dwell on the reality of his home than of himself. Katherine visits his mother and finds her sitting at a large dining-room table "untidily strewn with food and unflinchingly lit up by incandescent gas," bending over an unsatisfactory spirit-lamp.

"The unsparing light revealed more ugliness than Katherine had seen in one room for a very long time. It was the ugliness of enormous folds of brown material, looped and festooned, of plush curtains, from which depended balls and fringes, partially concealing bookshelves swollen with black school texts. Her eye was arrested by cross scabbards of fretted wood upon the dull green wall, and wherever there was a high flat eminence, some fern waved from a pot of crinkled china, or a bronze horse reared so high that the stump of a tree had to sustain his forequarters."

That is excellent writing and invaluable for the creation of a proper atmosphere.

It is in this sense of atmosphere that Virginia Woolf most clearly shows her great gifts. The broad green spaces, the vista of trees, the ruffled gold of the Thames in the distance at Kew, the Strand which makes Katherine think in terms of mathematics, and the Embankment which sent her back to her dream forest, the ocean beach, the leafy solitudes, the magnanimous hero, are delicately but surely made to serve their turn in the unravelling of the story. "Strange thoughts are bred in passing through crowded streets should the passenger, by chance, have no exact destination in front of him, much as the mind shapes all kinds of forms, solutions, images when listening inattentively to music."

So walking down the Charing Cross Road Katherine wonders if she would mind being run over by a motor-bus or having "an adventure with that disagreeable-looking man hanging about the entrance of the Tube station," and her mind answers, No. She could not conceive fear or excitement.

So Ralph Denham's mind is filled with a sense of the actual presence of Katherine when in Lincolnshire he sees "laid out on the perfectly flat and richly green meadow at the bottom of the hill a small grey manor house, with ponds, terraces and clipped hedges in front of it, a farm-building or so at the side, and a screen of fir-trees rising behind, all perfectly sheltered and self-sufficient. Behind the house the hill rose again, and the trees on the farther summit stood upright against the sky, which appeared of a more intense blue between their trunks."

So Mrs Hilbery in her consciousness of the running green lines of the hedges, the swelling ploughland, the mild blue sky finds a pastoral background to the drama of human life.

So Ralph associates Mary with the mist of winter hedges and the clear red of the bramble leaves: so Mary with regard to Ralph. "Her thoughts seemed even to take their colour from the street she happened to be in. Thus the vision of humanity appeared to be in some way connected with Bloomsbury and faded distinctly by the time she crossed the main road; then a belated organ-grinder

in Holborn set her thoughts dancing incongruously; and by the time she was crossing the great misty square of Lincoln's Inn Fields she was cold and depressed and horribly clear-sighted."

Mary, by the way, is nearer our conception of a likeable person than anyone else in the book. She has at any rate attained to the standpoint that life is full of complexity and must, in spite or because of that, be loved to the last fibre of it.

And so it is with us: we carry away, after putting *Night and Day* down for the last time, an atmosphere of a room full of deep shadows, firelight, unwavering silver candle flames, and empty spaces to be crossed before reaching the round table in the middle of the room, with its frail burden of silver trays and china tea-cups, red parrots swinging on the chintz curtains and arm-chairs warming in the blaze.

And so we come to read *Night and Day* in a mood very different from that which sends us to *Tom Jones* or *Wuthering Heights*: there is no full-blooded narrative full of incident or wild, insatiable passion. It is a penetrating, shrewd comedy wherein many feckless people are portrayed to the life. It is essentially modern in so far as there is no attempt to make us fall in love with the hero or heroine: we are never on the verge of tears through pity of their fate, though we are interested by their confused states of mind.

We are never unable to put the book down: on the other hand, there are few that we are more inclined to pick up and read for the *n*th time. There is a rich harvest of beauty on almost every page; there is true satirical humour; there is brilliance of intellect, clarity of aim and complete fearlessness: above all, there is strangeness and individuality, and the reader who turns away from *Night and Day* because the atmosphere has failed to ensnare him in the first three hundred or so pages deserves our pity. He has missed a real treat, both emotional and intellectual.

VIII

E. C. BOOTH

THERE are many people whose taste in fiction is so fastidious that the sight of dialect in a novel makes them refuse to read it. To such people Mr Edward C. Booth makes no appeal. Both in *The Cliff-End* and *Fondie* (his two great books) well-nigh every character speaks in a broad Yorkshire accent. They are stories of the soil, of people who move in a world very different from that which Mr Stephen M'Kenna has annexed as his own. His novels move in a most leisurely manner, like the people in them: anyone who reads novels for their plots alone may omit Mr Booth's name from his library list. Neither in *The Cliff-End* nor *Fondie* does the actual plot matter much. In point of fact, the basic idea in each is rather stupid. Pamela is so sweet a girl that the Spawer would never have hesitated at all in real life; Blanche in reality would never have drowned herself for so little a reason as one illegitimate child.

No: we read *The Cliff-End* for its spaciousness, its freshness, its rippling current of humour, its myriad living characters, its beautiful setting and its picture of love. For it is first and last a rattling good love romance.

You can test your appreciation of Mr Booth by his opening chapters. If the description of Tankard's Bus fails to charm you, don't read on. Such fare is not for you. But there are many of us who can be sufficiently grateful for such a beginning as this:

"Tankard's Bus is the most beautiful bus in the world—the biggest, blandest, noblest, longest, good-naturedest, most magnanimous . . . no fewer than five steps swing at its tail-end to two yards out, with balustrades of real brass. Five steps form the complement of a full-grown flight of stairs in Ullbrig—as many, indeed, as take most of us up to bed . . . only to take one sacramental sniff of its cushions is to be filled as a perfumed vase with the breath and spirit and sympathy of the district; is to

divine the soul of the soil, the heart of the heavy-headed corn, a-flush to the cliff-edge; the sensuous sway of the barley in ceaseless stir of mystic communion; the stillness of turnips; the rustle of oats; the grateful green of pasture, traversed slowly here and there with streaks of dun and white-and-tan, and the fleecy grey blots of nibbling sheep; the murmur of many waves; the rippling cadence of the reaper; the busy hum of the threshing-machine, in indefatigable ascent and descent of its three semitones . . . it is timed to leave the Market Arms at three o'clock. To make quite sure of a corner seat you would do well to be sitting in it by four o'clock at the latest. . . ." All the way through the first chapter we watch this 'bus filling and emptying like a bee-hive, threading its way at last out of Hunmouth, away into the country-side . . . " and so on and so on and so on, along the dusty hedge-lined road, homeward in the slanting beams of gold, with the sun spinning dizzily behind and the great elongated shadow of Tankard and his colleagues thrown far away out before, till that last moment when the mill spreads its mighty arms to the left-hand window in welcome of home-coming, and the squat, square-towered church stares stolidly through the other with its unwinking blue-diamond clock eye, and the little red roofs gathered round its midway give warm greeting over the latticed hedges in the mellowed evening light."

Not only has Mr Booth observed accurately and with the eye of an artist this corner of East Yorkshire scenery, but he has made himself complete master of the vernacular.

"'Ev ye 'eard 'ow Mester Jenkison' mother' sister-in-law's gettin' on, Steg?'

"'Ay,' says Steg.

"'Ow is she then?'

"'She's deead.'

"'Nay! Is she an' all? Poor owd woman!'

"'She is that!' says Steg, warming with a sense of triumph to the work, as though he had the credit of her demise. 'She deed ti morn at aif-past six.'

"'An' when's t' buryin'? Did y'ear?'

"'Ay, they telt me,' says Steg.

"'It'll be o' Thosday, Ah's think.'

"'Nay, bud it wecan't. Wensday. There's ower much thunder about for keepin'.'"

A man who can make his yokels talk like this has got little to learn.

In Father Mostyn Mr Booth has created one of the most glorious parsons in fiction.

"'Ha! The vicar's lobster if you please. Not out of the window there; I won't have lobster out of the window. The sunlight has a peculiar chemical action upon the tin, liberating certain constituents of the metal exceedingly perilous to the intercostal linings.'"

Nothing that goes on in the village is hidden from him, so we see him at once making friends with the Spawer, the stranger who comes to Cliff-End to compose his music in quiet. "The house stands endwise to the sea, set deep in a horse-shoe of trees; a big, hearty, whitewashed building under bronze-red tiles; two storeys high in front, that slope down backward over the dairy toward the stack-garth till they touch its high nettles. . . . The kitchen takes up the whole end of the house, facing two ways. The first window watches the lane across the red tile path and the little unclassified garden; the second comes on to the broadside front of the house, facing south, where the sun is a gorgeous nuisance after mid-morning in summer, . . . dipping below the sunk stone wall and the dry nettle-grown ditch in which the ball buries itself instinctively whenever you hit it, is the big grass field for cricket, with the wickets always standing. And beyond this, sweeping away in every direction . . . go the great lagoons of corn, brimming up to their green confines . . . and the dim Garthstone windmill turning its listless sails over in dreamy soliloquy across three miles of fattening grain and green hedge and buttercupped pasture . . . and the celestial sound of the sea, two fields off, tipping the lonely shore . . . and the stirring of lazy leaves, the chick of poultry, the soothing grunt of distant pigs . . . the solaceful shutting of unseen gates. . . ."

God forbid that we should hurry amid surroundings such as these. Readers of *The Cliff-End*, fully to enjoy it, must imitate our village youths who prop themselves up by the wall of the bridge every Sunday afternoon and

watch the water flow underneath in complete content for six hours at a time.

We are content to dawdle with the Spawer in his little, faded, old-world, out-of-the-world room, with its choir of pink roses on the walls and his own books scattered indiscriminately about: Daudet, Tolstoi, Turgenev, Molière, Swinburne and so on.

By the time we reach chapter eight we have forgotten to wish that anything should happen . . . and immediately something does. A sudden human sob breaks in upon the Spawer as he plays Chopin at midnight.

"Outside, the world lay wrapped in a great breathing stillness. Night's ultramarine bosom was ablaze with starry chain of mail. From the far fields came faint immaterial sounds, commingled in the suspended fragrance of hay, in warm revelations of ripening corn, in the aromatic pungency of nettles, and all the humid suffocation of herbs that open their moist pores at even. Distant sheep, cropping in ghost-like procession across misty, dew-laden clover, contributed now and again their strange, cutting, human cough." The night calls him and he jumps out of the window: he hears garments in swift full stir, the rending of a frock . . . and at last sees, "struck in fugitive stoop to stone, the dim, motionless figure of a girl." In a voice that had "the rare mellow sweetness of blown pipes about it" she explains that she couldn't resist coming to hear him play. "He noted the wide generous forehead, the big consuming eyes, burning deep in sorrowing self-reproach and giving him a moment's gaze over the uplifted tumbler; the dispassionate narrow nose, sprinkled about its bridge . . . with a pepper-castor helping of freckled candour; the small lips, the long, sleek cheeks; the slender, pear-shaped chin; the soft, supple neck of russet tan, spliced on to a gleaming shaft of ivory; the quick-throbbing throat and the burning lobes of red, like live cinders, in her hair . . . she wore a shabby pale blue tam-o'-shanter. . . ." And this vision turns out next morning to be the post-girl. He learns her history from the Vicar. "'Pamela, you mean! I knew we should come to that before long. She's not like the rest of us; comes of a different class altogether. . . . Take note of her when she laughs . . . she covers the whole diapason.

Ullbrig doesn't laugh like that. Ullbrig laughs on one note, as though it were a plough furrow.'" He weaves a fantastic story out of the little that he knows about her: a mother dying of a broken heart, having married beneath her, come to Ullbrig to escape the world, leaving Pamela, who "can do everything in the world except kill chickens." She can bake bread, paper-hang, paint, milliner and dress-make and plays the organ in church. She lives with John William Morland, who combines the office of postmaster with the trade of cobbler.

"'Stop a bit,'" the stern voice of the postmaster would tell you when you laid the penny and the boots on the counter together, and shot out your dual request for a "'stamp an' these 'ere solin'.'" "'Let's 'ave one thing at a time. Stamps 'as nowt to do wi' shoes, an' shoes 'as nowt to do wi' stamps. Tek yer boots off'n counter, or 'appen Ah s'll be slippin' 'em away by parcel post, an' then where sewd we be? . . . Noo; stamps fost; let's know what ye want.'"

Which point being settled and the penny rung into the till, he would suddenly cast his Governmental mask under the counter, throw the austerity out of his voice, and catch up the shoemaker's smile all at once in a quick-change act marvellous to behold.

The Vicar arranges a feast which Pamela prepares for and of course shares with him and the Spawer. And the collation is described as Dickens would describe it, to make your mouth water:

"There was a chicken-pie in a Mother Hubbard frill, with its crust as brown as a hazel-nut, and just nicely large enough to feed half-a-dozen, which is a capital size for three; and a noble sirloin of beef, fringed with a hoary lock of horse-radish, and arching its back in lonely majesty on an oval arena of Spode, . . . and there was a salad, heaped up high under the white and yellow chequer of sliced eggs, and a rosy tomato comb, in a glorious old oaken bowl as big as a kettle-drum, . . . and there were some savoury eggs, deliciously embowered in their greenery of mustard and cress . . . and a tinned tongue . . . and some beetroot . . . and whipped creams, and a trifle pudding, all set out on snowy white damask amid an arctic glitter of glass and silver and cutlery. Except the

cheese, which was a Camembert, and went by itself on the grained side-cupboard."

After the olives and the herrings Father Mostyn approaches the beef with a terrible "'Ha! I see you've not forgotten what I told you. The exterior albumen's duly coagulated for the preservation of the nutritive juices, and there's a fine osmazonic smell that bodes well for the flavour.'"

Who wants to go on to the love episode when he can stay and refresh himself with a feast like this? Not I, for one. The longer I can stay with "the little tongues of crimson ham and grey-brown purple buttons of mushrooms" the better so long as Pamela is there. I want as many helpings as possible of the stewed plums, the custard, the trifle pudding, the port-wine jellies, the whipped creams and the cheese. Time enough for love. There is the music to follow: the A flat Prelude twice, the Black Study, bits of Beethoven, the 111, snatches of Brahms . . . and to Pam as to us "there seemed not more happiness in Heaven."

All too quickly even that night the shadows fall: Pam goes home and encounters the village schoolmaster, a fellow-lodger at the Morlands', the veins in whose forehead stood out always, a thin, frail consumptive, who tortures himself with love of her. This night he waits up for her and makes her try to care for him, as so many others have in the past. Out of pity for him she could not bring herself to deal the one smart blow that the moment required: the strength was lacking, and so she prepares for herself terrible consequences. The plot thickens. The Spawer sees more and more of Pam, he teaches her music, but he is already engaged to a girl in Switzerland of whom Pam knows nothing. He screws up his courage to tell her on one notable day when he goes with her to take dainties and administer comfort to an old dying man. The description of this one afternoon and evening takes up many chapters of the book, and the gradual leading up to the crisis where the Spawer has to tell Pam is wonderfully done.

Exactly at the moment when she acknowledges her sorrow at his departure the schoolmaster emerges out of the blackness and takes her away: she discovers now the Spawer is going that she is in love with him. "'He likes

me,'" she says to the accusing consumptive, "'but he doesn't love me. I wish he did. . . . But I'm not good enough for him. There has never been any question of his loving me. He is engaged to marry somebody else . . . and he may leave Ullbrig any day. When he told me he was going . . . I was so unhappy that I began to cry. I couldn't help it. I didn't think he would notice . . . but he did . . . and tried to comfort me. And then—and then—you were there and saw. And I love him—I love him—I love him and I tell you. . . .'"

She is fated to take the letter to her lover which she imagines will summon him away from her . . . and she fails to deliver it. The schoolmaster discovers her crime, gets it from her and makes her promise to marry him before he will restore it (this is where the actual story becomes unbearably silly—people don't do these things). She decides to run away; the same night the Spawer walks along the cliffs late, and the schoolmaster, who has discovered Pam's flight, shadows him, so clumsily that the Spawer discovers him: they argue on the cliff edge and the Spawer falls over: Pamela hears his scream and goes to the rescue, and the two discover their love for each other at death's door. They are cut off from help by the rising tide.

"'I want to ask you . . .'" he said. "'You know why I was going back. The other letter was—from Her. She asks me to set her free. If there hadn't been—been any other one in the case, and I'd asked you . . . to marry me . . . would you have married me?'"

In an instant the girl's arms were about the man's neck, and her lips upon his lips, as though they would have sucked the poor remaining life out of his body into her own . . . yea—though Death stood by their side . . . yet could he not arrest this moment.

"'Oh—my love, my love!' the girl wept through the wet lips that clung to him. 'What do I care about dying now? I would rather a thousand times die to learn that you had loved me—than live and never know it. Promise me—you will not—let go of me—when the time comes. . . . Don't let me go. I want to die with you.'

"And there being nothing else to do, they stood and waited for death. . . ."

But this is a love romance: it could not be allowed to end like that. Drunken Barclay, having missed Tankard's Bus that night, hears Pam's calls for help and saves them both and gives us and Mr Booth a fuller chance to revel in a regular orgy of love. The Spawer was glad to be thus helpless on his back, for the glory of being cradled in such a love, and learning his love over again, from the lips and looks and actions, the dear, large-hearted A B C Primer of Pam. "Her very love of him, issuing towards him from every pore of her body, fertilised the girl's own beauty, like the sap in the lush hedgerows at spring. Her soft, velvet eyes . . . darkened and deepened . . . till they were beyond all plumb of mortal gaze. Her lips . . . coloured now to a deeper, clearer carmine, with little pools of love visible lurking in the corners of them . . . her lashes . . . grew black as ebony . . . her freckles . . . more purely golden.

"And Pam stooped over him as she was always doing, and slipped her linked fingers under his neck, and looked into his face first, and kissed him . . . and buried her face by his, and lifted it to look at him once more, and kissed him again. . . . Who should stop her now from telling him she loved him, loved him, loved him?"

Yes, there is no doubt about it: Mr Booth, whose gift for seeing things is so remarkably acute, can describe the passion of love with the best of them. Not easily does one forget those dear, kissable, candid freckles, powdered in pure gold-dust about the bridge of the nose and the brows . . . the great round eyes with the blacky-brown velvety softness of bulrushes . . . the rapt red lips . . . the big beneficence of hair . . . the oaten-tinted cheeks . . . the little pink lobes . . . the tanned russet neck . . . and the pale blue tam-o'-shanter of our beloved Pam. She is one of the most alive heroines in fiction, and the man who doesn't find himself a good deal more in love with her than the Spawer was is not to be envied.

Fondie is a novel of quite another sort. It is the grim tragedy of a flirtatious daughter of an impoverished country parson who gets "let down" by an undergraduate and drowns herself.

It has the same excellent qualities that so distinguish *The Cliff-End*, in that it is leisurely, the dialect is wonderfully

reproduced, the scenery painted with an exquisite sense of colour and exactness, the characters all live . . . and there is Fondie the wheelwright, Fondie the foolish, who "never used bad language even when unprovoked," who was not a bit of good among the girls, who did his best work when he was not being paid for it, who was always respectfully in love with the girl, Blanche, and offered to marry her when she had already got into trouble with the other man. "'Lad's fond,'" said his father, who was as "laughterless as Jehovah and as summary. 'He'll do owt onnybody tells him.'"

There are many inimitable anecdotes scattered irrelevantly through these pages, the best of which is perhaps that of the black bull which coughed grass and spittle all down the back of Bless Allcot's neck while he was engaged in fervent prayer in the chapel: "Thoo's best not ti pray public of a Sunday or two, Bless Allcot, till thoo's had a chance ti pray private," shouts Fondie's father to the prayer . . . and an altercation starts during divine service which nearly develops into a fight.

An example of Mr Booth's humour may be seen in his description of the installation of the harmonium in the chapel:

"There were two grand services . . . and the cobbler from Sproutgreen walked all the way over to Whivvle in a parson's hat and a white tie, to tell folk what a sinful life he had led in his younger days and how, but for the Living Word, he might probably have been wearing a grey coat and coloured kerchief to this day, and been even as the other sinners whom he had met this morning bicycling along the road to Hell. And Bless Allcot's eyes were as wet as cut lemons . . . and at both services he prayed in the key of G flat minor for absent Brethren."

Fondie's father, who in old days had scraped his fiddle-strings so frenziedly in that chapel that he had to give the fiddle a rest for one verse in three, "to cool her bearings and prevent her from firing," naturally hated the innovation, but went to the chapel to shame the others . . . "he went, casting the chapel into such a hush as if he had been his own corpse, so that the praying went as dry as a duck-pond in August . . . and Bless Allcot's daughter let the wind out of the harmonium time after time and

lost all her faculty for counting how many verses there were in each hymn" . . . and Fondie's father returns home triumphant:

"'Aye. It's been a judgment on 'em. Lord's visited 'em.'"

Fondie, like the Spawer in *The Cliff-End*, "could bide music as long as a sow could bide scratching," and Blanche made him play the organ for her in church, but because he wouldn't kiss her, altered the figures in the hymns, making threes into eights and ones into sevens so that he would play his worst, which he did.

"If he had been half a man—for there was nobody in the workshop at the time, except the two of them, amid the seductive warm scent of fresh pine-shavings—Fondie would have thrown both arms round Blanche's neck and held on. Blanche would only have whispered, 'Shut up, Fondie! Fondie, you silly fool!' and Fondie would have whispered, 'Who's a silly fool?' between the kisses, and Blanche would have answered, 'You, you fool!' struggling with just sufficient discretion to give his kisses the requisite raptorial flavour . . . and who knows how differently Whivvle history might have had to be written. . . . For that one kiss, or the lack of it, is altering lives the whole world over."

So Fondie is left to experience all the pitfalls of the double chant and odd verse as the village church organist and the awful feeling that accompanies the falling into it, as if one had slipped off the belfry ladder in the dark.

The family to which Blanche belonged was a big one, but most of them were abroad: there was, however, Harold, in an accountant's office in Hunmouth, who went to music halls twice a week and wore cuffs, and a younger brother, who went to the village school and wore corduroys, but Blanche was the only one that mattered—Blanche with her profligate golden hair and blue eyes, Blanche of the cheap Birmingham jewellery, Blanche, who inspired respect from no one except Fondie, who addressed her as "Miss," or "Miss Blanche" in all circumstances, "as naturally as he would take up his gravy on the knife-blade, without, for a moment, contemplating any other way."

We are shown Blanche in all her nakedness, from her

earliest days, when "I wish I had a sovereign for every time that Blanche rode in the hat-rack in defiance of the notice that this was provided for light luggage only," until the day when the verdict on her body goes forth, "Found Drowned." She would have assignations in the belfry while Harold folded cigarettes during the Litany and pared his nails for the coming week and read *The Confessions of a Lady's Maid* and *Secrets of Matrimony* with his head down, as if he had had a stroke, whilst his father preached from Samuel and Kings.

"The Creator that conceived and executed Blanche, and equipped her with that amphitheatre of teeth and those scintillating eyes, must have been a tyro at his trade if he really expected sobriety and worship of them; or else a jocund God of Mirth, who loved laughter and human happiness."

Her father had even occasion to take for his text one day: "My daughter hath a devil" . . . and she certainly was a thorn in his flesh. He made periodic attempts to put his house in order and his foot down, but within three days of new regulations he would have to give up his attempt at discipline and go back to his hens and tool-shed and the nutrition of the vicarage pig, while Blanche locked herself in her bedroom and learnt the mysteries of life from books that she stole from her brother and *Sunday Sacred Pennyworths*, where "the advertisements were even more absorbing than the literary matter and contributed liberally to her education."

This picture of the sordid, poverty-strieken vicarage life would make us weep were it not for the light relief afforded by the villagers, in such gorgeous scenes as that in which Fondie swarms the bees:

"'Thee wants ti gan up fierce-like, same as Bless says, an' sing a bit as thoo gans, an' swear when thoo gets ti top, an' mek bees think thoo's as good as them.'"

When he has finished collecting them he looks less like a victim of bees than of overstudy.

Meanwhile Blanche goes from conquest to conquest among her boys (always excepting Fondie) and makes with him a new friend in Lancelot Griffith D'Arcy Mersham. Fondie becomes more and more proficient in his trade of wheelwright and in his passion for music:

"Music stirred him, he knew not how or why; books, too, haunted him with the desire to read them—and beauty, whether of Blanche, or of a bird, of sunset or moonrise, of stars or blossoms, troubled him with a sweet sickness, a pining of the soul to be something other and something better than he was." Blanche fails to make much headway with the aristocratic Lancelot, who prefers the society of Fondie and helps him to throw off much of his vernacular so that he becomes more or less bilingual. In the church, or elsewhere, he spoke of "harmonium" and "home" and "Hunmouth," and said, "I am, sir," and "Were you, sir?": whereas in public he systematically dropped one "h" in every three out of consideration for his hearers' feelings, and said, "I misdoot" and "I'se fit ti think" and "nobbut" and "jealous" as before.

Blanche rises to the height of a bicycle, which gave her scope to extend the range of her acquaintances, but we don't hear much of these. Her fatal day is that of the Mersham Flower Show, to which she went "in a pale lavender print frock and a large straw hat trimmed with shasta daisies and blue cornflowers, spinning a creamy sunshade over her shoulder with a white-cotton-gloved hand." For it was here that she met for the first time Leonard D'Alroy, who was afterwards to prove her undoing. Mr Booth is lavish in his details of this show, and surely no flower show has ever been so admirably described: he misses nothing from the swing-boats to the sports with their inevitable clamour of unfairness on the part of the judges. "'Steeny would very like a' been first nob-but he only went ti choch a bit reglarer, and sung i' choir.'" We take leave of Blanche on this occasion by watching her fade away in the dusk with her arms about the neck of a boy on a bicycle, shouting "Oo-li-oo!" to all other defeated admirers. From that day the young squire was seen riding down the streets of Whivvle "with his hat at the back of his head" at very frequent intervals. In October he vanished to be "larned high books at Oxford," and by mid-November we see Blanche changed. This was not the Blanche of "Don't cares" and "Aren't frighteneds." This was another Blanche born of the fierce crucible of the cares and fears she had once so recklessly defied—Time had chosen this month to take a stern revenge at

last. She goes to call on the carrier's wife and faints: her condition is discovered.

"Not that she had ever looked for marriage, or thought of it. No word of marriage had ever passed between them: no word of love even. Their attachment had been but physical; their affection only make-believe—to colour fact, and suffuse reality with romance. Only that insatiable appetite for life had really led her wrong; that passion for physical vitality; the same fierce desire to do something with her body, to put it to some purpose, that Deacon Smeddy and others of the pious experienced in regard to the soul; not merely to possess it, but to be sensible of its possession and quicken it into an ardent instrument of life."

The carrier's wife takes her home and her father is acquainted with the truth about his daughter in these words: "'I'se jealous Blanche is like to be a mother, sir.'" The Vicar then calls on the opulent Rector of Mersham, who stoutly denies that his nephew could possibly be to blame.

"You ought to have kept your daughter safe at home, Bellwood. Why, good gracious, a dog-fancier could have taught you better wisdom in the matter than you seem to have shown."

Meanwhile Fondie hears and fells a man who jests about Blanche's delinquency.

"There are those who affirm that Fondie grew into a man from this hour." Leonard D'Alroy doesn't answer Blanche's letters and her last hope is wrested from her. She meets Fondie, who tells her at last what he has always felt for her:

"I've never had but one feeling for you, miss, since day I was old enough to have any. You know now what that feeling is, without one having to name it, in case it isn't to your approval. . . . I should be prouder wi' you, Miss Blanche—than any other man in England is wi' all pride he can muster."

But she won't let him make that great sacrifice for her: she goes off and drowns herself.

"Who knows, Blanche, save you whose icy lips retain the secret safely locked behind them—who knows but that Destiny led you well and wisely, and that her cruel

hand was kindest after all? For now you can never grow old: age can haunt you with no terrors. . . . Death? Upon your pillow you have lain dead and dreamless many an hour: by the sedgy margin of the muddy pond itself, often on summer afternoons have you laid your face upon your arms, turned from the unbearable brightness of the sun and sky, and tasted a few brief minutes of irresistible, sweet death. And of the darkness never were you yet afraid. . . . God's hand, be sure, is gentler than a child's: there is no thunder on God's lips, nor dreadful lightnings in His eyes. If Fondie were God you would not fear him. Fear God, then, less, nor think God's infinite mercy will suffer to be put to shame by the finite compassion of a wheelwright's son."

And we leave Fondie as ever thinking upon whatsoever things are true, honest, just, lovely and of good report. Fondie has a soul for his inheritance, a soul that was swiftly, wholesomely alive.

Mr Booth has written other books than these two, but they represent him at his best in the vein of rich comedy and in the vein of real tragedy.

That they are worth reading ought to be obvious even from the extracts alone that I have quoted . . . they leave one with a feeling that here is a rare artist with a finely developed sympathy and sensitive soul, capable of appreciating and loving all manner of men, sunny-tempered, magnanimous, one who glorifies all such things as are of good report. We read Mr Booth because he makes us love him, and not all authors, not all good authors even, are lovable.

IX

FORD MADOX HUEFFER

WE read Mr F. M. Hueffer's work because it shows a versatility that is quite out of the common in modern authors.

He is successful with *vers libre* (which is decidedly uncommon) and even with rhymed *vers libre* (which is more uncommon still).

"*Vers libre*," he says, "is the only medium in which I can convey more intimate moods. *Vers libre* is a very jolly medium in which to write and to read, if it be read conversationally and quietly."

> "What is love of one's land? . . .
> I don't know very well.
> It is something that sleeps
> For a year—for a day—
> For a month—something that keeps
> Very hidden and quiet and still
> And then takes
> The quiet heart like a wave,
> The quiet brain like a spell,
> The quiet will
> Like a tornado; and that shakes
> The whole of the soul."

His poem *On Heaven*, which he afterwards wished to suppress as being "too sloppy," contains these lines:

"Nor does God need to be a very great magician
To give to each man after his heart,
Who knows very well what each man has in his heart:
To let you pass your life in a night-club where they dance,
If that is your idea of Heaven: if you will, in the South of France;
If you will, on the turbulent sea; if you will, in the peace of the night;
Where you will, how you will;

Or in the long death of a kiss, that may never pall :
He would be a very little God if He could not do all this,
And he is still
The great God of all."

But it is not as a poet, a taste of whose quality I have just given you, that he would be judged.

It is as the novelist who wrote two of the most interesting novels of our time, *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes* and *The Good Soldier*.

The former is the best historical romance that I have ever read.

Mr Sorrell, a mining engineer who had taken up publishing, is travelling up from Plymouth to London when the train goes off the line and he wakes up to find himself living in the fourteenth century possessed of a twentieth-century brain and filled with twentieth-century ideas. He is in possession of a sacred talisman which all the people he meets want to deprive him of : incidentally the fact that he has it causes everyone to treat him with great respect.

With every regard for detail even to language Mr Hueffer builds up a picture for us of life in 1326 in a Hampshire castle:

"A great many sounds of trumpets came from the castle below to proclaim that supper was about to be set on the boards. The sun was just down below the hills, for at that harvest time of the year, when all men and women were wont to be in the fields helping to get in the oat crop and the last of the hay, supper, which was usually at four, was not partaken of till after sunset.

"It was not really dark, but blue shadows had fallen over the long valley of the Wiley, mists were arising amongst the heavy foliage of the trees. The castle of Tamworth, farther down the valley, showed enormous and purple, as if it blocked up all the passage way, and the houses of the little town of Wishford, which was beyond the bridge, being visible from that high place, showed their white mud sides all pink in the light reflected from the sky. From the top of the Portmanmote Hall, the gilded effigy of the Dragon of Wiley turned slowly in the capricious air of the evening, sending forth now a stream of light, and again being obscured. The cavalcade

of the Lady Dionissia had reached the foot of the green knoll, and her trumpeter blew a turn of notes to demand admission to the castle of Coucy."

We are given every detail of the lives of these mediæval people right down to the odours that pervaded the court.

We see Mr Sorrell sitting down to a first course at dinner of fourteen dishes, eating a piece of dark-looking meat, both salt and sweet and tasting of nutmeg and cinnamon, having the consistency of soft jelly. He finds even his wines spiced with cloves.

The first dish of the first course was a compound of the tongues of rabbits, hedgehogs, deer, geese and wild boars, the breasts of partridges and the livers of pheasants. It contained, moreover, forcemeat balls made of honey, cinnamon and flour boiled in wine, and the same was made of honey, nutmegs, cloves, garlic and mint. Next he had to taste a panade of herring boiled in white wine, covered with a sweet sauce compounded out of cherries, which seemed to Mr Sorrel to be a mixture of strawberry jam and oysters.

"The pages carried away the plates and emptied them into a great tub with two handles which served for the broken meat of the poor waiting outside the castle gates. This was done to the sound of trumpets. And whilst the second course was being brought, a man came in with a bear that danced in a sort of horseshoe formed by the two tables along the wall and the small table on the dais. This man had with him a girl who danced upon her hands with her feet in the air."

Conversation ran on exploits in the Holy Land, strange happenings in the Adriatic and miracles, amid a din of knives, teeth, crying out for more wine, more ale, more metheglin, so that Mr Sorrell could neither hear others nor make himself heard. When he complained orders were given and a man armed with a long stick like a hop-pole began running down the tables striking people on the heads and hands, "upsetting drinking vessels and sending platters of meat skimming on to the rushes, where they were devoured by the many and large dogs that lay beneath all the tables.

In the next part of the book we are shown the young knight of Egerton with his leman, a fifteen-year-old girl who sulked because she had no velvet gloves set with

stones, no hawk from Norway, no white horse of her own with trappings of silver, no monkey, or collars of pearls, or a weekly allowance of five pounds of sugar. She had to pour hot water over her capricious master as he sat in his bath and bear with all his queer tantrums.

"In the room in which she had to live the walls were all of bare stone and the young knight was accustomed to lock her in there for days at a time, so that she knew every stone and every patch of damp. . . . The bed was of walnut wood gone black and very huge, so that it would hold four persons: the hutch at its foot was of a rough oak gone grey." The young knight in the midst of his ablutions suddenly notices spots of rain upon his armour and leaps out of his bath on to his page. "His mantle, blazing red and white and clasped at the neck with a buckle of gleaming beaten gold weighing three ounces, whirled out all round him; the water dripped from his wet and hairy limbs that, white beneath the scarlet and all knotted and distorted, fell like the sails of a windmill about the page's ears."

Gertrude the leman taunts him and he rounds on her, and yet he could not "raise his hand against this insulting atomy, he, who had been famed for having in ten years seven of the most beautiful lemans in Christendom. There had been Isabelle de Joie, with hair like corn; Constance de Verigonde, with teeth like pearls; Bearca la Belle, with breasts like mother-of-pearl; Bice de Carnas, with arms like alabaster; and Jeune la Ciborice, whose breath was sweeter than the odour of pinks. . . ."

We are even shown the Queen Mother and the little King.

"The Queen was a fat matron, with a cunning, determined face. Her eyes were small, brown, and keen. Her dress was of purple velvet, all of one piece, and sewn with thick gold thread that glinted in the seams. About her waist she had a rope of amber beads that was twisted before her and fell in two ropes at her feet. The King was all in scarlet, a boy of fourteen. Upon his yellow hair was a small circlet of gold; round his knees were two garters of solid gold links; the ends, passing through the buckles, fell down to the top of his shoes that were very long and gilded."

In the next part of the book we see Mr Sorrell riding in

the narrow streets of Salisbury. "The houses were all very low; they were all built of mud and they were all raggedly thatched, house-leeks growing from many roofs, and on others great tufts of flags. The houses were set down at all angles to the road. Sometimes it was very narrow, so that they could hardly pass, . . . and the geese fled shrieking at their approach. Sometimes it was so broad that . . . the great pigs would continue to wallow undisturbed in the pools of mud. . . . He observed noise, dirt, nauseous smells, and great crowds of importunate and ugly people. They were nearly all in ragged clothes of a grey home-spun. Some had capes, some hoods with long tails like funnels; most of the men had leather belts; most of the women went bare-legged, and were very dirty . . . most of the children . . . were crooked, distorted, or bore upon their faces pock-marks of a hideous kind."

Nearer the cathedral were houses of stone, bales of cloth set out to attract customers, men weaving at looms, and great joints of meat upon hooks, in huge cellars below. Over these cellars were suspended signs of gilded suns, boys painted green and brown, swans and unicorns. Men emerged from the cellars in green jerkins or red surcoats furred with white lamb's-wool. Having accompanied Mr Sorrell to the door of the cathedral, his hostess, Lady Dionissia, went back to the town to buy some juice of fir-trees "said to be sovereign for hardening and strengthening the hands of warriors." Meanwhile Mr Sorrell entered the new, brilliantly coloured building, the interior roof of which was grass-green, picked out with bright golden images of angels, queens and grinning fiends. Everybody round was talking loudly, some drinking, most of them selling cherries and eggs; the monks were painting, the chapter clergy whispered and laughed, for it was blood-letting day. Mr Sorrell performs his mission with the Dean, which is to secure the Church's sanction for the Lady Dionissia to divorce her husband (the young knight of Egerton) and marry him: this is an inimitably humorous piece of satirical writing on bribery and corruption in the Church.

"'It is neither decent nor in order to desire to marry a lady who is already married,' said the Dean.

"'I desire to do it,' Mr Sorrell said, 'with the sanction of the church.'

"'That, of course,' the Dean said seriously, 'is another matter.'"

Mr Sorrell finds himself slipping all too easily into his new life and suffers periodic twinges of conscience.

"'Surely it is pleasant,'" he says to his paramour on the return ride of this visit to Salisbury, "'but I cannot see that it is well, and pleasantness is not the whole of life . . . are there not such things as duties, ambitions, and responsibilities?'

"'I do not know what these things are,' answered the Lady Dionissia. 'In the spring the moles come out of the woods and the little birds sing, and we walk in the gardens and take what pleasure we can. And then comes the winter, and shuts us up in our castles so that it is not so pleasant; but with jongleurs and ballad-singers we pass the time as well as we may.'

"'It is just that that is so fatal,' Mr Sorrell said. 'It is just that that I am slipping into. You dress me up in these scarlet clothes, and I take a pleasure in it; you ride a-hawking, and it seems to me the whole end of life when your tassel strikes down a heron or a daw. . . .'

"'When I first set eyes on you,'" she replies a little later, "'I knew that I loved you, and what more is there to ask or to say? . . . Gentle friend, is it a new thing that a great knight, putting upon himself the garb of a minstrel, and accompanied by a page or two and a few men of arms to give him sufficient state and respect, should journey through the world and sing of the high things of love, or of great adventures in arms? . . . We should travel through the great forests and along the broad streams and over the endless plains.'

"The breath from her lips was sweet, like the breath of cows that have come out of the clover fields: closer and closer they drew to each other.

"'Before you came,' she said, 'there was nothing in the whole world——'

"'There was no sweetness in the world before I came here to you,' he answered. . . . 'I have come down to you through centuries; all the men of my past are like a few phantoms—there is only you in all the world.'

"With a great rustling there came from the wood a wild sow, but they did not hear it. . . . There stole in Mr Sorrell's nostrils a penetrating perfume. An immense dread swept down on him, the dumb agony of a nightmare. He seemed unable to move . . . agony was in his heart, on his lips that would not speak, in his throat whose muscles would not act. The perfume overwhelmed him, suffocating, warm, sweet in the throat, sinister and filling him with a mad foreboding. It was the odour of chloroform. He screamed out loud; great beads of sweat burst out on his forehead.

"He stretched out his hand like a madman and clutched at her dress.

"'Are you there?' he asked, and she answered:

"'I am here, beloved of my heart,' and he lifted his face towards hers which was slightly cold with dew and the night.

"'It is so well with me,' she whispered: but Mr Sorrell was full of fears."

The cleverness of that touch of the chloroform at that particular stage in the story is amazing. I know nothing quite like that chapter in all fiction.

We are then swept back at once to a pageant of colour where the ladies hold a tourney and Mr Sorrell is knighted by Sir Ygorac of Fordingbridge as Sir Guilhelm de Winterburne de St Martin. The Lady Dionissia fights in the lists against the Lady Blanche, first with spears and then with axes, which fight the Lady Dionissia, of course, wins. She then goes with Mr Sorrell to his new castle and her husband returns and kills the new knight of Winterburne . . . and Mr Sorrell wakes up, wakes up to intolerable agony in a hospital.

Two months afterwards he goes back to Salisbury to retrace the steps and rides all over the country-side in search of—— "A girl shot past them going very fast. She had a face of conspicuous fairness, a dress of light blue print, a white linen coif that hid all her hair.

"'My God!' Sir William said suddenly. [He is now Sir William Sorrell.] 'Did you see? Who was that? In God's name who was that?'

"'Why,' young Lee-Egerton said, 'that was Nurse Morane. The one who nursed you till the first time they

trepanned you. She broke down the day before they trepanned you the second time. My mother says she couldn't stand the excitement, because she was in love with you."

Sir William galloped off down the road and up the hill towards a cluster of old and falling buildings. . . . "It was so old that you could hardly recognise it for a house, and so forlorn that you shivered when you passed it . . . the living-room into which Sir William went was large, long and low. It was quite empty . . . a door . . . opened gently. There appeared a girl in a blue dress.

"'You are Sir William Sorrell,' she said. 'I am Dionissia Morane. . . . I was born in this room. . . .'

"'What does it all mean?' he asked.

"'I can't tell,' she answered. 'Do you know, after they trepanned you for the first time you said suddenly, "Es tu là?" and reached out your hand to me, and I took your hand . . . and I kept saying to myself, "It is very well with me," which is what the country people about here say when they are glad.'"

Sir William builds a replica of the fourteenth-century castle and Dionissia ruminates on the future.

"'In the summer it will be very pleasant: the birds will sing, and we shall walk in the gardens. And in the winter we shall go into our little castle, and we shall sit by our fire, and our friends will come and we shall pass the time in talking and devising. And all around us there will be the oceans of time and the ages of space——'

"'I've heard that before,' he said.

"'Yes, certainly you've heard all that before,' she answered. 'It's nothing new; it's the oldest wisdom or the oldest folly. You will find it in Chaucer . . . you will find it in the Bible, because there's nothing else really to say. . . . It's the only thing that's worth saying in life.'"

Quite another vein is struck in *The Good Soldier*, which is essentially a modern novel. It is a story of betrayals. The man who tells the story finds that his wife is the mistress of his friend, the good soldier.

"I can't believe that that long, tranquil life, which was just stepping a minuet, vanished in four crashing days at the end of nine years and six weeks."

Edward Ashburnham, the man in the case, "was the cleanest-looking sort of chap: an excellent magistrate, a first-rate soldier, one of the best landlords in Hampshire."

There is practically no conversation; the whole novel is a monologue, a going forward or a harking back to unravel intricate motives and to lay bare the souls of men and women.

Florence, the wife of the narrator, had apparently always been a harlot at heart, but had successfully hoodwinked him for years. Leonora, the betrayed wife of the good soldier, adored her husband with a passion that was like an agony, and hated him with an agony that was as bitter as the sea.

Florence one day had laid one finger on Captain Ashburnham's wrist. "I was aware of something treacherous, something frightful, something evil in the day. . . . In Ashburnham's face I knew that there was absolute panic. . . . 'I can't stand this,' said Leonora, with a most extraordinary passion. 'I must get out of this.' I was horribly frightened. . . . 'Don't you see,' she said, 'don't you see what's going on? . . . Don't you see that that's the cause of the whole miserable affair; of the whole sorrow of the world? And of the eternal damnation of you and me and them?' Her eyes were enormously distended; her face was exactly that of a person looking into the pit of hell and seeing horrors there." But he sees nothing. In Florence he thought he had a wife and an unattained mistress—and in the retaining of her in the world (she pretended to have serious heart trouble) he had his occupation, career and ambition.

Ashburnham had begun his intrigues by being arrested for kissing a servant girl in a train. He left servants alone after that and ran amok with girls of his own class. There was Mrs Maidan, who died—of heart trouble, at twenty-three. Florence had come upon Leonora boxing Mrs Maidan's ears. . . . There had been an affair with a harpy mistress of a Russian Grand Duke, who exacted a twenty-thousand-pound pearl tiara from Edward as the price of her favours for a week. It was not that he was a promiscuous libertine: he was a sentimentalist.

We find it hard to realise all through this rambling discourse that until Edward and the last girl concerned

and Florence were all dead the narrator had not the shadow of a suspicion that there was anything wrong. "I suppose that during all that time I was a deceived husband and that Leonora was pimping for Edward. . . . You ask how it feels to be a deceived husband. . . . It is not Hell, certainly it is not necessarily Heaven. . . . I hate Florence. I hate Florence with such a hatred that I would not spare her an eternity of loneliness . . . she cut out poor dear Edward from sheer vanity; she meddled between him and Leonora from a sheer, imbecile spirit of district visiting. Do you understand that, whilst she was Edward's mistress, she was perpetually trying to reunite him to his wife? . . . Once she said to Florence in the early morning: 'You come to me straight out of his bed to tell me that that is my proper place. I know it, thank you. . . . Yes, you would give him up. And you would go on writing to each other in secret, and committing adultery in hired rooms. I know the pair of you, you know. No. I prefer the situation as it is.'"

Mrs Maidan had died on the 4th of August 1904 and then nothing happened until the 4th of August 1913. It was on the 4th of August 1901 that the narrator had married Florence, who had then hinted that she did not want much physical passion from her husband. She elaborated rules so that she should never be caught. "I must never enter her room without knocking, or her poor little heart might flutter away to its doom." Her first lover, Jimmy, she discarded for Edward as soon as he appeared on the scene. It was because she was afraid that her husband would murder her that she took such precautions.

"Well, there you have the position . . . the husband an ignorant fool, the wife a cold sensualist with imbecile fears . . . and the blackmailing lover . . . and then . . . Edward Ashburnham, who was worth having." But within three years he was sick of Florence and would willingly have let the husband see what his wife was like, but Leonora threatened to wreak appalling vengeance if any inkling of the truth filtered through. The worst vengeance would have been to refuse herself ever to see him again . . . but the husband discovers the truth about his wife from a stranger in an hotel.

"'Do you know who that is?' asked the stranger of me as Florence burst past. 'The last time I saw that girl she was coming out of the bedroom of a young man at five o'clock in the morning. . . .'

"A long time afterwards I . . . went up to Florence's room. She had not locked the door—for the first night of our married life. She was lying . . . on her bed. She had a little phial . . . in her right hand. That was on the 4th of August 1913.

"Florence had found that Edward for the first time in his life was really finally in love with a young girl called Nancy Rufford.

"For every man there comes at last a time of life when the woman who then sets her seal upon his imagination has set her seal for good. He travels over no more horizons . . . that was the case with Edward and the poor girl."

Anyway that was the end of Florence. "You have no idea how quite extraordinarily for me that was the end of Florence. From that day to this I have never given her another thought . . . she just went completely out of existence, like yesterday's paper. . . . It was as if an immensely heavy knapsack had fallen off my shoulders. I was in love with Nancy Rufford—I who was forty-five and she twenty-two, a miracle of patience who could be almost miraculously impatient."

Edward then began to drink heavily, owing to his frustrated passion for her: she looked on him as an uncle and he could not make love to her and it was killing him.

The chronicler at this stage goes over his tracks as he often does to give us the earlier history of Leonora and Edward, who had come together in an extraordinary state of innocence. He had admired her for her truthfulness, her cleanness of mind, the clean-run-ness of her limbs, the fairness of her skin, the gold of her hair, her religion, her sense of duty. But she failed to have for him a touch of magnetism, while in her admiration for his qualities soon became love of the deepest description. "There could not have been a happier girl for five or six years." They never had any children: they did not even know how they were produced for some years after their marriage. He came to regard her as physically and mentally cold:

she wished for the child that never came. Meanwhile after the episode of the servant girl Edward could not have a mistress without falling violently in love with her; but the Spanish dancer cured him of that. The passion that he had for her arose "like fire in dry corn" . . . and from the moment of his unfaithfulness with her Leonora never acted the part of wife to him, though there were moments when she was within a hair of yielding to her physical passion for him. She had the vague, passionate idea that when Edward had exhausted a number of other types of women he must turn to her. . . . Florence knocked all that on the head.

The cleverest and most interesting thing in the book is the masterly way in which the narrator manages to convey to us all the points of view of everybody concerned—Leonora's, Edward's, Florence's and his own.

Never till the moment when Florence began to gain ascendency over Edward did Leonora despair of getting him back. But when she saw Florence lay her hand upon Edward's wrist she knew that that touching of hands gave that woman an irrevocable claim—to be seduced. And she so despised Florence that she would have preferred it to be a parlour-maid. But she said nothing to Florence's husband. She had to give Edward to understand "that if ever I came to know of his intrigue she would ruin him beyond repair." And then Florence had died, and the girl Nancy with whom the narrator is in love becomes the object of Edward's fiercest passion: his love for her threatened to kill him and she knew . . . and she offered him herself and he could not accept the offer of her virtue and they sent her back to her father in India.

"'You can't let that man,' said Leonora, 'go on to ruin for want of you. You must belong to him.'

"'I knew you would come to that,' answered Nancy very slowly. 'But we are not worth it—Edward and I.'"

And because she wouldn't Edward killed himself and Nancy went mad: they sent the narrator out to bring Nancy home.

"She is, I am aware, sitting in the hall, forty paces from where I am now writing. . . . I should marry Nancy if her reason were ever sufficiently restored to let her appreciate the meaning of the Anglican marriage service. . . . Is

there any terrestrial paradise where, amidst the whispering of the olive-leaves, people can be with whom they like and have what they like and take their ease in shadows and in coolness? Or are all men's lives like the lives of us good people—like the lives of the Ashburnhams, of the Dowells, of the Ruffords—broken, tumultuous, agonised, and unromantic lives, periods punctuated by screams, by imbecilities, by deaths, by agonies? . . . I can't conceal from myself the fact that I loved Edward Ashburnham—and that I love him because he was just myself. If I had had the courage and the virility and possibly also the physique of Edward Ashburnham I should, I fancy, have done much what he did."

We read novels like *The Good Soldier* and *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes* for their freshness and honesty of outlook. They follow no stereotyped form of writing; they lay bare character in an unusual manner; they demand intelligent reading and an appreciation of the quietly subtle. They give a picture of life which is devoid of sentimentality, true to experience and courageously uncoloured. Most of all they give the impression of being written by a careful and highly gifted artist.

Mr Hueffer is a master of English prose style.

X

THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE

MOST people have read G. K. Chesterton's prose, many people have read the drinking songs in *The Flying Inn*, some people have read his collected Poems, and a few, only too few, have read the work by which he will probably be remembered when all the rest of his work is dead. *The Ballad of the White Horse* was first published in 1911 and is, as might be expected, a vindication of Christianity. "I say, as do all Christian men, that it is a divine purpose that rules, and not Fate," he quotes as his motto. He dedicates the poem to his wife because of "the sign that hangs about your neck":

> "Therefore I bring these rhymes to you,
> Who brought the cross to me."

Before we have read five pages we realise that here is at last a ballad which is not a spurious imitation. It rings clear, clean and true. We see Alfred beaten to his knees by "a sea-folk blinder than the sea," almost broken-hearted, beseeching the Virgin Mary for a sign.

> "'Mother of God,' the wanderer said,
> 'I am but a common king,
> Nor will I ask what saints may ask,
> To see a secret thing. . . .
>
> But for this earth most pitiful,
> This little land I know,
> If that which is for ever is,
> Or if our hearts shall break with bliss,
> Seeing the stranger go?
>
> When our last bow is broken, Queen,
> And our last javelin cast,

Under some sad, green evening sky,
Holding a ruined cross on high,
Under warm westland grass to lie,
Shall we come home at last?'"

And she answers:

"'I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.

Night shall be thrice night over you,
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?'"

Stirred by this message, Alfred sets out yet again to stir zeal in his chiefs for the causeless cause.

"Up across windy wastes and up
Went Alfred over the shaws,
Shaken of the joy of giants,
The joy without a cause. . . .

The King went gathering Christian men,
As wheat out of the husk;
Eldred, the Franklin by the sea,
And Mark, the man from Italy,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree,
From the old tribe on Usk."

We are first given a picture of Eldred's farm fallen awry, "Like an old cripple's bones," with its purple thistles bursting up between the kitchen stones. But Eldred, the red-faced, bulky tun is sick of fighting.

"'Come not to me, King Alfred,
Save always for the ale. . . .
Your scalds still thunder and prophesy
That crown that never comes;
Friend, I will watch the certain things,
Swine, and slow moons like silver rings,
And the ripening of the plums.'"

Alfred merely repeats the message of the Virgin Mary, tells him where to meet him and goes away certain of his help. He next goes to Mark's farm, the low, white house in the southland, inhabited by the bronzed man with a bird's beak and a bird's bright eye.

> "His fruit trees stood like soldiers
> Drilled in a straight line,
> His strange, stiff olives did not fail,
> And all the kings of the earth drank ale,
> But he drank wine."

Alfred gives his message and the Roman answers:

> "'Guthrum sits strong on either bank
> And you must press his lines
> Inwards, and eastward drive him down;
> I doubt if you shall take the crown
> Till you have taken London town.
> For me, I have the vines.'"

But Alfred is certain of his help too and goes on to the lost land of boulders and broken men, where dwells Colan of Caerleon:

> "Last of a race in ruin—
> He spoke the speech of the Gaels;
> His kin were in holy Ireland,
> Or up in the crags of Wales. . . .
>
> He made the sign of the cross of God,
> He knew the Roman prayer,
> But he had unreason in his heart
> Because of the gods that were. . . .
>
> Gods of unbearable beauty
> That broke the hearts of men."

He ridicules Alfred until he hears the warning:

> ". . . that the sky grows darker yet
> And the sea rises higher."

Then he tosses his black mane on high and cries:

"'And if the sea and sky be foes,
We will tame the sea and sky.'"

And so Alfred is sure too of his help.

Alfred is then taken by the Danes as he is playing on his harp to the camp of Guthrum and there is made to sing and play again:

"And leaving all later hates unsaid,
He sang of some old British raid
On the wild west march of yore.

He sang of war in the warm wet shires,
Where rain nor fruitage fails,
Where England of the motley states
Deepens like a garden to the gates
In the purple walls of Wales."

He sang until Harold, Guthrum's nephew, snatched the harp from him and began in his turn to sing of ships and the sea and material delights:

"'Great wine like blood from Burgundy,
Cloaks like the clouds from Tyre,
And marble like solid moonlight,
And gold like frozen fire.'"

Elf the minstrel then took the instrument:

"And as he stirred the strings of the harp
To notes but four or five,
The heart of each man moved in him
Like a babe buried alive."

He sang of Balder beautiful, whom the heavens could not save . . . and finishes with these two peerlessly beautiful verses:

" 'There is always a thing forgotten
When all the world goes well;
A thing forgotten, as long ago
When the gods forgot the mistletoe,
And soundless as an arrow of snow
The arrow of anguish fell.

The thing on the blind side of the heart,
On the wrong side of the door,
The green plant groweth, menacing
Almighty lovers in the spring;
There is always a forgotten thing,
And love is not secure.' "

Earl Ogier of the Stone and Sling next took the harp and sang in praise of " Fury, that does not fail ":

" 'There lives one moment for a man
When the door at his shoulder shakes,
When the taut rope parts under the pull,
And the barest branch is beautiful
One moment, while it breaks. . . .

And you that sit by the fire are young,
And true loves wait for you;
But the King and I grow old, grow old,
And hate alone is true.' "

Guthrum in his turn takes the great harp wearily and sings of death:

" 'For this is a heavy matter,
And the truth is cold to tell;
Do we not know, have we not heard,
The soul is like a lost bird,
The body a broken shell. . . .

Strong are the Roman roses,
Or the free flowers of the heath,
But every flower, like a flower of the sea,
Smelleth with the salt of death.

And the heart of the locked battle
Is the happiest place for men. . . .
Death blazes bright above the cup,
And clear above the crown;

But in that dream of battle
We seem to tread it down.

Wherefore I am a great king,
And waste the world in vain,
Because man hath not other power,
Save that in dealing death for dower,
He may forget it for an hour
To remember it again.' "

And then Alfred seizes it again and triumphantly, scornfully, sings his pæan in praise of his own creed:

" ' But though I lie on the floor of the world,
With the seven sins for rods,
I would rather fall with Adam
Than rise with all your gods.

What have the strong gods given ?
Where have the glad gods led ?
When Guthrum sits on a hero's throne
And asks if he is dead ? . . .

. . . Though you hunt the Christian man
Like a hare on the hill-side,
The hare has still more heart to run
Than you have heart to ride. . . .

Our monks go robed in rain and snow,
But the heart of flame therein,
But you go clothed in feasts and flames,
When all is ice within ; . . .

Ere the sad gods that made your gods
Saw their sad sunrise pass,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale,
That you have left to darken and fail,
Was cut out of the grass.

Therefore your end is on you,
Is on you and your kings,
Not for a fire in Ely fen,
Not that your gods are nine or ten,
But because it is only Christian men
Guard even heathen things.' "

Alfred then goes away and is struck by the woman in the forest for letting her cakes blacken.

> " ' He that hath failed in a little thing
> Hath a sign upon the brow ;
> And the Earls of the Great Army
> Have no such seal to show. . . .
>
> . . . I am the first king known of heaven
> That has been struck like a slave.' "

He takes the blow as a good omen :

> " ' For he that is struck for an ill servant
> Should be a kind lord.' "

He collects his followers and they go roaring over the Roman wall and fall upon the Danes at Ethandune. In the first phase we see Alfred's men waking to the realisation of the high folly of the fight and despair clawing at their hearts.

> " For the Saxon Franklin sorrowed
> For the things that had been fair,
> For the dear dead women, crimson clad,
> And the great feasts and the friends he had ;
> But the Celtic prince's soul was sad
> For the things that never were."

Alfred asks for his people's prayers and the Roman Mark proudly says :

> " ' Lift not my head from bloody ground,
> Bear not my body home,
> For all the earth is Roman earth
> And I shall die in Rome.' "

Harold then comes forward in gay colours smoking with oil and musk, and taunts the ragged Colan with the rusty sword : he takes his bow and shoots an arrow at Colan, who sprang aside and whirled his sword round his head and let it sweep out of his hand on to Harold's head. The Dane fell dead and Alfred gave his own sword to Colan and himself seized a rude axe from a hind hard by and turned to the fray.

In Book VI., " The Slaying of the Chiefs," we are first

shown Eldred breaking the sea of spears "As a tall ship breaks the sea."

"But while he moved like a massacre
He murmured as in sleep,
And his words were all of low hedges
And little fields and sheep.

Even as he strode like a pestilence,
That strides from Rhine to Rome,
He thought how tall his beans might be
If ever he went home."

But in the end the sword broke in his hand and he falls to the seventh "faerie blade" of Elf the minstrel.

"Six spears thrust upon Eldred
Were splintered while he laughed;
One spear thrust into Eldred,
Three feet of blade and shaft."

But he was soon avenged by Mark:

"Right on the Roman shield and sword
Did spear of the Rhine maids run;
But the shield shifted never,
The sword rang down to sever,
The great Rhine sang for ever,
And the songs of Elf were done.

Ogier in his turn avenges Elf:

"But hate in the buried Ogier
Was strong as pain in hell,
With bare brute hand from the inside
He burst the shield of brass and hide,
And a death-stroke to the Roman's side
Sent suddenly and well.

Then the great statue on the shield
Looked his last look around
With level and imperial eye;
And Mark, the man from Italy,
Fell in the sea of agony,
And died without a sound."

The Danes in their triumph sing:

"'No more shall the brown men of the south
Move like the ants in lines,
To quiet men with olives
Or madden men with vines.'

There was that in the wild men back of him [Ogier],
There was that in his own wild song,
A dizzy throbbing, a drunkard smoke,
That dazed to death all Wessex folk,
And swept their spears along.

Vainly the sword of Colan
And the axe of Alfred plied—
The Danes poured in like brainless plague,
And knew not when they died.

Prince Colan slew a score of them,
And was stricken to his knee;
King Alfred slew a score and seven
And was borne back on a tree."

The King was beaten, blind, at bay, and we are taken on to Book VII., "The Last Change," where Alfred is compared to a small child building one tower in vain, piling up small stones to make a town, and evermore the stones fall down and he piles them up again.

"And this was the might of Alfred,
At the ending of the way;
That of such smiters, wise or wild,
He was least distant from the child,
Piling the stones all day.

For Eldred fought like a frank hunter
That killeth and goeth home;
And Mark had fought because all arms
Rang like the name of Rome.

And Colan fought with a double mind,
Moody and madly gay;
But Alfred fought as gravely
As a good child at play.

He saw wheels break and work run back
And all things as they were;
And his heart was orbed like victory
And simple like despair.

Therefore is Mark forgotten,
That was wise with his tongue and brave;
And the cairn over Colan crumbled,
And the cross on Eldred's grave.

Their great souls went on a wind away,
And they have not tale or tomb;
And Alfred born in Wantage
Rules England till the doom.

Because in the forest of all fears
Like a strange fresh gust from sea,
Struck him that ancient innocence
That is more than mastery."

And so Alfred began his life once more and took his ivory horn unslung and smiled, but not in scorn:

"'Endeth the Battle of Ethandune
With the blowing of a horn.'"

He collects his remnants and incites them to a last desperate effort:

"'To grow old cowed in a conquered land,
With the sun itself discrowned,
To see trees crouch and cattle slink—
Death is a better ale to drink,
And by high Death on the fell brink,
That flagon shall go round.' . . .

And the King held up the horn and said:
'See ye my father's horn,
That Egbert blew in his empery,
Once, when he rode out commonly,
Twice when he rode for venery,
And thrice on the battle-morn.'"

So

". . . the last change went blindly,
And all too lost for fear:

The Danes closed round, a roaring ring,
And twenty clubs rose o'er the King,
Four Danes hewed at him, halloing,
And Ogier of the Stone and Sling
Drove at him with a spear."

But the Danes were careless, and Alfred split Ogier to the spine: the tide miraculously turned and the Danes gave way and retreated clamouring, disorderly:

"For dire was Alfred in his hour
The pale scribe witnesseth,
More mighty in defeat was he
Than all men else in victory,
And behind, his men came murderously,
Dry-throated, drinking death."

So at last the sign of the cross was put on Guthrum and

"Far out to the winding river
The blood ran down for days,
When we put the cross on Guthrum
In the parting of the ways."

And in the last book, "The Scouring of the White Horse," we see Alfred at peace again.

"In the days of the rest of Alfred,
When all these things were done,
And Wessex lay in a patch of peace,
Like a dog in a patch of sun—

The King sat in his orchard,
Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom
And the sunshine on his head."

And he gathered the songs of simple men, and gave alms, and "gat good laws of the ancient kings like treasure out of the tombs"; and men came from the ends of the earth and went out to the ends of the earth because of the word of the King.

"And men, seeing such embassies,
Spake with the King and said:

'The steel that sang so sweet a tune
On Ashdown and on Ethandune,
Why hangs it scabbarded so soon,
All heavily like lead?'"

They asked: "Why dwell the Danes in North England and up to the river ride?"

"And Alfred in the orchard,
Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom,
Looked at green leaves and said:

'When all philosophies shall fail,
This word alone shall fit;
That a sage feels too small for life,
And a fool too large for it.

Asia and all Imperial plains
Are too little for a fool;
But for one man whose eyes can see,
The little island of Athelney
Is too large a land to rule.

. . . But I am a common king,
And I will make my fences tough
From Wantage Town to Plymouth Bluff,
Because I am not wise enough
To rule so small a thing.'"

He only commands his men to keep the White Horse white. Rumour of the Danes to the eastward, Danes wasting the world about the Thames reaches him, but Alfred only points to the White Horse.

"'Will ye part with the weeds for ever?
Or show daisies to the door?
Or will you bid the bold grass
Go, and return no more? . . .

And though skies alter and empires melt,
This word shall still be true:
If we would have the horse of old,
Scour ye the horse anew. . . .

But now I wot if ye scour not well
Red rust shall grow on God's great bell
And grass in the streets of God.' "

He has a vision that the heathen will return.

" 'They shall not come with warships,
They shall not waste with brands,
But books be all their eating,
And ink be on their hands. . . .

By this sign you shall know them,
The breaking of the sword,
And Man no more a free knight,
That loves or hates his lord. . . .

When is great talk of trend and tide,
And wisdom and destiny,
Hail that undying heathen
That is sadder than the sea.' "

He sees no more, but rides out doubtfully to his last war on a tall grey horse at dawn.

" And all the while on White Horse Hill
The horse lay long and wan,
The turf crawled and the fungus crept,
And the little sorrel, while all men slept,
Unwrought the work of man. . . .

And clover and silent thistle throve,
And buds burst silently,
With little care for the Thames Valley
Or what things there might be."

And the King took London Town.

I have given enough illustrations to show the masculine strength and virility of this amazing poem. We read G. K. Chesterton for his wit, for his brilliance, for his delightful paradoxes, for his sanity and wholesomeness, but we read him most of all for his brave creed, for his defence of Christianity and his love for the eternal values of honour, uprightness, courage, loyalty and devotion, for his steadfast adherence to whatsoever things are of good report.

XI

E. M. FORSTER

THIS is really a chapter about one book, not about a man. It is quite true that Mr Forster has written a number of novels, but he is only remembered by one and that is a decade old. He is a very skilful and careful artist and interested in classical myth rather more than he is in us: he is a scholar with a good deal of the poetic in him; when he lets his thought dwell on us poor moderns his satiric vein appears predominant, though he too, like the rest of us, had to let the autobiographical have its way in two novels: *A Room with a View* and the schoolmaster's book, *The Longer Journey*, give us, if we want to know them, many facts about himself, but wiser people will plump for *Howard's End* and forget the others —only hoping that he will soon give us something more in that vein.

There was a slight flutter in our dovecotes when we saw the announcement of a novel by him early in 1920, but *The Syren* is not a novel and is not new. It is a delicious trifle, artistically perfect . . . but from a man who can give us real men of the type of Leonard Bast we want no chatter about blue grottoes, however perfect.

Yes, I fully realise that E. M. Forster published *Howard's End* in 1910, but he has not written a novel since, and, as W. L. George says, "He is still one of the young men, while it is not at all certain that he is not 'the' young man." "Mystic athleticism" is the phrase that Mr George uses as his label for him, and so far as labels ever fit, this will do.

We read *Howard's End* for its unexpectedness, its elliptic talk, which so exactly hits off the characters he creates, for its manifestation of the Comic Spirit, for passages such as the following, which abound:—

"It will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man. All sorts and conditions are

satisfied by it. Whether you are like Mrs Munt ["I do know when I like a thing and when I don't"] and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come—of course, not so as to disturb the others—or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music's flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee . . . or like Fräulein Mosebach's young man, who can remember nothing but Fräulein Mosebach: in any case, the passion of your life becomes more vivid, and you are bound to admit that such a noise is cheap at two shillings."

We read *Howard's End* for the merciless skill which E. M. Forster shows in laying bare the soul of Leonard Bast, the clerk in the insurance office, who reads Ruskin and goes to the Queen's Hall in order to improve himself, who is dragged into the gutter by his loose-living mistress ("she seemed all strings and bell-pulls, ribbons, chains, bead necklaces that chinked and caught——"). . . . We read *Howard's End* for the equally merciless sketch of the millionaire husband of the heroine ("a man who ruins a woman for his pleasure, and casts her off to ruin other men. And gives bad financial advice, and then says he is not responsible. These men are you. You can't recognise them, because you cannot connect. I've had enough of your unweeded kindness. I've spoilt you long enough. All your life you have been spoiled. . . . No one has ever told what you are—muddled, criminally muddled").

Mr E. M. Forster's eyes are pellucidly clear in their vision both of rich and poor. "Only connect," he says. That is the cause of all the folly and cruelty in the world, lack of power to connect. Think of this picture of Leonard Bast. "Hints of robustness survived in him (he came of Lincolnshire yeoman stock), more than a hint of primitive good looks, and Margaret, noting the spine that might have been straight, and the chest that might have broadened, wondered whether it paid to give up the glory of the animal for a tail coat and a couple of ideas. Culture had worked in her own case, but during the last few weeks she had doubted whether it humanised the majority, so wide and so widening is the gulf that stretches between the natural and philosophic man, so many the good chaps who

are wrecked in trying to cross it. She knew this type very well—the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books."

But he should not have permitted an untimely end even to such a man: it is bad artistry to overweight your dice. When any character in a book of this sort goes to prison or dies (except in child-birth) one cannot help feeling that the author has burked the issue or been too lazy to work out his thesis to a reasonable, logical conclusion. Like Margaret in *Howard's End*, who did not see that to break her husband was her only hope, but did rather what seemed easiest, so E. M. Forster does what seems easiest, and the result is a certain falsity all the more reprehensive because in so many ways this book is head and shoulders above any of its era. Helen's gift of herself to Leonard Bast is absolutely true to life.

"It never occurred to him that Helen was to blame. He forgot the intensity of their talk, the charm that had been lent him by sincerity, the magic of Oniton under darkness and of the whispering river. Helen loved the absolute. Leonard had been ruined absolutely, and had appeared to her as a man apart, isolated from the world. . . . She and the victim seemed alone in a world of unreality, and she loved him absolutely, perhaps for half an hour."

Notice the last five words—"perhaps for half an hour": that is the secret of E. M. Forster's greatness. He plays the game with the gloves off, he strips bare all the fopperies and artificialities of the world. All these characters have to learn how entirely different from the formal codes they are brought up to believe are the real codes of existence. Listen to Helen:

"'I want never to see him again, though it sounds appalling. I wanted to give him money and feel finished. Oh, Meg, the little that is known about these things.'"

Listen to Margaret's attitude when she finds out that her husband has been unfaithful.

"Now and then he asked her whether she could possibly forgive him, and she answered: 'I have already forgiven you, Henry.' She chose her words carefully, and so saved him from panic. She played the girl, until he could rebuild his fortress and hide his soul from the world. When

the butler came to clear away, Henry was in a very different mood—asked the fellow what he was in such a hurry for, complained of the noise last night in the servants' hall. Margaret looked intently at the butler. He, as a handsome young man, was faintly attractive to her as a woman—an attraction so faint as scarcely to be perceptible, yet the skies would have fallen if she had mentioned it to Henry."

It is into Margaret's mind that E. M. Forster puts the ideas that take pride of place in *Howard's End.*

"Margaret greeted her lord with peculiar tenderness on the morrow. Mature as he was, she might yet be able to help him to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man. With it love is born, and alights on the highest curve, glowing against the grey, sober against the fire. Happy the man who sees from either aspect the glory of these outspread wings. The roads of his soul lie clear, and he and his friends shall find easy-going."

"It was hard-going in the roads of Mr Wilcox's soul. From boyhood he had neglected them. 'I am not a fellow who bothers about my own inside.' Outwardly he was cheerful, reliable, and brave; but within, all had reverted to chaos, ruled, so far as it was ruled at all, by an incomplete asceticism. Whether as boy, husband, or widower, he had always the sneaking belief that bodily passion is bad, a belief that is desirable only when held passionately. Religion had confirmed him. . . . He could not be as the saints and love the Infinite with a seraphic ardour, but he could be a little ashamed of loving a wife. . . . And it was here that Margaret hoped to help him . . . *only connect*! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die."

If we demand of modern novels that they should portray human character exactly as it is and that the author should have a definite standpoint for his philosopher of

life, one need quote no further to prove that in *Howard's End* these two desirable factors are to be found in profusion.

Mr E. M. Forster is a conscious artist of a very high order and our only quarrel with him is that he writes too little.

XII

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

WE read Sheila Kaye-Smith because she alone among the women writers of to-day writes with the sure touch of a man. This is not to decry other writers of her sex of the stamp of Clemence Dane (though there are very few good women novelists): it is that Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has a masculine strength; her narrative flows strongly, she has an uncanny knowledge of and kinship with the elemental things of the soil.

We read her for her breadth of outlook, her sense of the beauty of the Sussex that she has made hers as much as Thomas Hardy has made Wessex his, for the dignity and excellent music of her English prose style. She has an accurate sense of history and can with equal ease place her characters at the beginning as at the end of Victoria's reign.

Her dialect (all her novels are full of dialect) is accurate if at times a little literary: there are too many "howsumdevers," "dunnamanys," "vrotherings," "spannelings" and "tediouses," but this is a very little blemish.

Her strength is seen fully fledged in *Sussex Gorse*, in the picture of Reuben battling with the forces of nature.

"He drank in the scent of the baking awns, the heat of the sun-cracked earth. It was all dear to him—all ecstasy. And he himself was dear to himself because the beauty of it fell upon him . . . his body, strong and tired, smelling a little of sweat, his back scorched by the heat in which he had bent, his hand strong as iron upon his sickle. Oh, Lord! it was good to be a man, to feel the sap of life and conquest running in you, to be battling with mighty forces, to be able to fight seasons, elements, earth, and nature. . . ."

He hates his son's poetic attitude, the boy who saw in nature a kind of enchanted ground, full of mysteries of sun and moon, full of secrets that were sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrifying. "It seemed to have a soul and a voice . . . and its soul was that . . . of a fetch, some country sprite."

But Reuben's hardness becomes his undoing: his hardness kills his beloved wife through overmuch child-bearing; his hardness sends one son to prison for stealing; his hardness makes him turn another son out of the house; his hardness, his strength, his remorseless nature left him to fight his battles with the land alone. He falls under the personality of Alice Jury, who was the first to ask him whether it was worth while fighting so hard to reclaim waste earth, to give up so much for the sake of a piece of land. "'Life is worth while,'" she says, "'in itself, not because of what it gives you.'

"'I agree with you there,' said Reuben; 'it's not wot life gives that's good, it's wot you täake out of it.'"

But in the wrangles which he had with this new type of womanhood he failed ever to convince her of the "worthwhileness" of his aim. Meanwhile through his excessive zeal Reuben had driven his youngest, weakling son to his death and continued to try to "draw out Leviathan with a hook." The cleverest of his sons regarded his father as a primordial gorilla, and Tilly, his daughter, despised him and married his enemy: his ambition drove him to make slaves of his children, and one by one they break the fetters and leave him. Alice tries to make him see reason. . . . "You don't see this hideous thing that's pursuing you, that's stripping you of all that ought to be yours, that's making you miss a hundred beautiful things, that's driving you past all your joys—this Boarzell. . . ." Nearly, very nearly, he married Alice . . . and she would have saved him. "She was utterly unlike anything there was or had been in his life, the only thing he knew that did not smell of earth. The pity of it was that he loved that strong-smelling earth so much."

She tells him that she would fight his schemes to the end, in love with him as she is: she would never beguile him with the thought that she could help him in his life's desire . . . but she called him, as no woman had ever called him, with all that of herself which was in his heart, part of his own being, and she was within an ace of winning: she was in the act of crossing to where he stood waiting with outstretched arms when he caught sight of Boarzell lying in a great hush, a great solitude, a quiet beast of power and mystery. "It seemed to call him

through the twilight like a love forsaken. There it lay, Boarzell—strong, beautiful, desired, untamed, still his hope, still his battle." So he turns his back on love and goes back to his lone fight with Nature. Almost immediately afterwards he meets Rose, tall, strapping, superbly moulded, animal Rose, free with her kisses, and experienced and energetic in love: he marries her: she wanted Reuben's love and she got it. "She was a perpetual source of delight to him! Her beauty, her astounding mixture of fire and innocence, her good humour, and her gaiety were even more intoxicating than before marriage. He felt that he had found the ideal wife. As a woman she was perfect, so perfect that in her arms he could forget her shortcomings as a comrade." She smoothed away the wrinkles of his day with her caresses, gave him love where she could not give him understanding, heart where she could not give him brain. She made him forget his heaviness and gave him strength to meet his difficulties, of which there were many. But she wanted no children, and Reuben had set his heart on more. She spent much money on the fastidious care of her person . . . so that he "sometimes had doubts of this beautiful, extravagant, irresponsible creature." Gradually he came to realise her uselessness, but when one more grown-up son ran away to sea Rose bore him a child, and her rich near relative died and he began to think that his luck was in. Unfortunately this relative of his wife's left all his money to an illegitimate son of whom no one had ever heard, and the fortune that Reuben had expected to inherit by marrying Rose fell elsewhere.

Shortly after this Rose finds the thirty years' difference between herself and her husband too much for her and she allows herself to love his foreman. Reuben locked her out of his house late one night when she had been out with her lover, so she has no alternative but to go off with him and leave Reuben in the lurch once more. He turns again to Alice: "Wot sort o' chap am I to have pride? My farm's ruined, my wife's run away, my children have left me—wot right have I to be proud? . . . She deceived me. I married her expecting money, and there wur none —I married her fur her body, and she's given it to

another.'" This love of Alice Jury's had nothing akin to Naomi's poor little fluttering passion, or to Rose's fascination, half appetite, half game. Someone loved him purely, truly, strongly, deeply, with a fire that could be extinguished only by death or . . . her own will. He is sorely tempted to give up his ambitious struggle—all his great plans had crumbled into failure. "Far better give up the struggle while there was the chance of an honourable retreat. He realised that he was at the turning-point—a step further along his old course and he would lose Alice, a step along the road she pointed and he would lose Boarzell. . . . His mind painted him a picture it had never dared paint before . . . comfort . . . his dear frail wife . . . himself contented, growing stout, wanting nothing he hadn't got, so having nothing he didn't want. . . ." But he turned his back on this with a shudder. Boarzell was more to him than any woman in the world. . . . Through blood and tears . . . he would wade to Boarzell, and conquer it at last. Alice should go the way of all enemies. "And the last enemy to be destroyed is Love." So he tore women out of his life, as he tore up the gorse on Boarzell. Caro, his sole remaining daughter, then gives herself to a sailor and goes off with him as his mistress. She felt very few qualms of conscience, even when the barrier was past which she had thought impassable . . . her life was brimmed with beauty, unimaginable beauty that welled up into the commonest things and suffused them with light. Also, about it all was that surprising sense of naturalness which almost always comes to women when they love for the first time, the feeling of "For this I was born." Sheila Kaye-Smith has a wonderful gift for depicting the passion of true love in the most beautiful manner.

"She never asked Dansay to marry her. He had given her pretty clearly to understand that he was not a marrying man, and she was terrified of doing or saying anything that might turn him against her. One of the things about her that charmed him most was the absence of all demand upon him."

But she is remorseless as Nature herself in her processes. A hundred pages later we see her own young brothers attempting to "pick her up" on the Newhaven Parade.

She has become a third-rate harlot, a bundle of rags and bones and paint.

"'I'm not happy, but I'm jolly. I'm not good, but I'm pleasant-like. . . . Mind you tell father as, no matter the life I lead and the knocks I get, I've never once, not once, regretted the day I ran off from his old farm.'"

The Boer War claims his youngest sons and Reuben is left alone at Odiam, except for his brother Harry, who grows more shrivelled, more ape-like every day. "Reuben was not ashamed at eighty years old to lie full length in some sun-hazed field, and stretch his body over the grass, the better to feel that fertile quietness and moist freshness which is the comfort of those who make the ground their bed."

In the end we leave him victorious: out of a small obscure farm of barely sixty acres he had raised up this splendid dominion, and he had tamed the roughest, toughest, fiercest, cruellest piece of ground in Sussex, the beast of Boarzell. His victory was complete. He had done all that he set out to do. He had done what everyone had told him he could never do. He had made the wilderness to blossom as the rose, he had set his foot on Leviathan's neck, and made him his servant for ever. . . . He knew that not only the land within these boundaries was his—his possessions stretched beyond it, and reached up to the stars. The wind, the rain, dawns, dusks and darkness were all given him as the crown of his faithfulness. He had bruised Nature's head—and she had bruised his heel, and given him the earth as his reward.

"'I've won,' he said softly to himself—'I've won—and it's bin worth while. . . . I've fought and I've suffered, and I've gone hard and gone rough and gone empty—but I haven't gone in vain. It's all bin worth it. Odiam's great and Boarzell's mine—and when I die . . . well, I've lived so close to the earth all my days that I reckon I shan't be afraid to lie in it at last.'"

There is a sense of complete unity, of complete mastery in this long novel that is lacking in nearly all other modern novels. It is a very high achievement for any author; for a woman it is amazing. Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith has given us the inside workings of a rough man's life from his earliest youth to his full four-score years: the secrets of

the soil lie bare before her scrutiny, and both in characterisation and in descriptive power she shows a power which is nothing short of genius.

All her books deal with a mighty conflict between a man's tugging desires. In *Tamarisk Town* the conflict is between a man's love of a woman and his ambition to build and develop a seaside town. In *Green Apple Harvest* the conflict lies between a man's love for a woman and his soul's salvation. It is in this last novel of hers that we get perhaps Sheila Kaye-Smith's most telling descriptions.

Passages of this sort abound:

"The moon was climbing up above the mists, and among them huddled the still shapes of the sleeping country, dim outlines of woods and stacks and hedges. Here and there a star winked across the fields from a farmhouse window, or a pond caught the faint, fog-thickened light of the moon. There was no wind, only a catch of frost on the motionless air, and the mist had muffled all the lanes into silence, so that even the small sounds of the night—the barking of a dog at Bantony, the trot of hoofs on the highroad, the far-off scream and groan of a train, the suck of all the Fullers' feet in the mud—were hushed to something even fainter than the munch of cows on the other side of the hedge."

Or this: "The mists had sunk into the earth or shredded into the sky, and the distances that had been blurred since twilight were now almost frostily keen of outline and colour. The air was thinly sweet-scented with the sodden earth, with the moist, golden leaves, with the straw of rick and barn-roof made pungent by dew."

Robert Fuller of Bodingmares falls in love with Hannah Iden, a gipsy, who is not so easy to conquer as the other girls he had made love to. . . . "'I want her, Clem,'" he says to his brother. "'She's lovely . . . her mouth makes my mouth ache . . . she smells of grass . . . and her eyes in the shadder—they mäake me want to drownd myself. I wish her eyes wur water and I could drownd myself in 'em.'"

Eventually she gives in to his importunity.

"'I love her,' said Robert, 'not because she's sweet, but because I can't help it; surelye . . . she'll let me love her—that's all I ask. All I ask is fur her to täake me and let me love her. . . . She döan't want a boy to love

her—she wants a man. . . . Hannah wurn't born to mäake men happy—she wur born to mäake them men.' "

Clem, the young brother, is unhappy about Robert and confronts Hannah, who retorts: " ' You're afraid of me because I've taught your Bob how to love, as none of the silly, fat young girls in this place have taught him. . . . I could teach you how to love, little hedgehog, if I hadn't your brother for scholard.' "

" For long afterwards her shadow seemed to lie on the dusk—on the wet gleam of the road, on the twigs and spines of the thorny hedges, on the clear sky with its spatter of yellow rain. Yet it was not her beauty which defiled, but the cruelty in which it was rooted like a rose-tree in dung. . . . Her crude physical power would not have disgusted him if it had had its accustomed growth out of a healthy instinct. . . . She was like the bitter kernel of a ripe, sweet fruit—she was the hard stone of Nature's heart. . . ."

All the same she contributed to Clem's own manhood, for it is not long after that he holds his own sweetheart Polly, despite her struggling, and loves her like a man at last with a passion that is not free from fierceness. So he at any rate achieves his happiness in marriage and becomes Polly's " dear Clemmy . . . his sweetness and gentleness were fundamental—a deep gratitude stirred in her heart, making her take his dark, woolly head in her hands and kiss it with the slow, reverent kisses of a thankful child, and then suddenly find herself the mother with that head upon her breast."

But Robert finds no such happiness with his gipsy love.

" ' Nannie, you're cruel—I can't mäake you out. You let me love you, and I'm full of heaven, but in between whiles you're no more'n a lady acquaintance.' "

To which she replies: " ' I'm not one of your Gentile rawnces who loves and kisses all day and half the night. . . . I love when I feels like it, and I bet I give you more to remember than any silly fat girl in these parts. . . .' "

He has to take her on her own terms . . . but she loves his bulk and beauty, and on this occasion she yields and her hardness melts into his passion " as a rock melts into a wave."

But she goes away, and betrays him by marrying one of her own kind and so drives Robert almost out of his mind.

As a reaction he turns to Mabel, an anæmic, town-bred, artificial type of girl who imparted to his "flagging taste a savour as of salt and olives."

"She brought the atmosphere of streets and shops and picture-houses into the stuffy little parlour of a country cottage. . . . After his country loves, it excited him to touch the novelty of a powdered skin—Mabel's powder and scent were part of a new and very gripping charm. . . ."

"It was June when Hannah came back. The hay had been cut in the low fields by the river, but the high grounds were still russet with sorrel and plantain and sainfoin waiting for the scythe. The lanes were dim with the warm dust that hung over them and mixed with the cloud of chervil and cow-parsley and fennel that filmed the hedges, making with it a sweet, stale scent of dust and flowers. Down by the watercourses the hawthorn had faded, and the meadowsweet sicklied the still air that thickened above the dykes and at night crept up as a damp, perfumed mist to farmhouse walls."

Suddenly Robert makes up his mind. To forget Hannah he decides to marry Mabel, and does so. "She was a lovely little girl, with her soft, powdered skin and her fluffy hair and her dainty ways." But she does not take kindly to her new life.

"Lying there in bed, in her flimsy, town-made night-gown, staring at the black, star-dazzled sky, listening to the sough of the reeds and the moan of the water . . . she would feel strangely and terrifyingly lonely . . . the common, homely fields seemed to take on a savage remoteness . . . even the man at her side, so familiar and commonplace to her now, by day her playfellow and companion and master, now seemed to take his part in the strangeness of it all . . . he belonged to this dark, unfriendly country, he was part of its clay; it had worked itself into him, his very skin smelt of its soil."

She gets jealous lest he should still hanker after his early love, and she taunts him with it. A frequent drinker, one night he returns drunk and has an accident: he is rescued by a frenzied zealot, who frightens him by depicting the terrors of hell and tries to save his soul, with the result that when he is well again he tramps round the countryside trying to convert all those who are not yet "saved."

Mabel somewhat naturally looks on his phase as evidence of lunacy. He gives up smoking and drinking and looks on himself as one of God's chosen.

"'I'm säafe, I'll never go in fear of hell no more. . . . When I think wot I wur—a very worm and no man, as the Scriptures say—and then I think how He has accepted me. . . . I reckon I'll give all my life to Him, to serve Him and love Him, and reckon as I'll never drink nor smoke nor grumble at Mabel as long as I live.'"

But Clem and Polly are not satisfied about him.

"'I can't help wishing,'" said Polly to her husband, "'as he hadn't got hold of such a Salvation sort of religion—I can't help thinking as he'll find as much trouble on his way to God as ever he found on his way to the devil.'"

People certainly liked him better as an "honest sinner."

"'Wotsumdever ull Bob do next? That's wot I'd lik' to hear,'" said Mary; "'fust it's a woman, and then it's drink, and then it's the devil, and then it's God: reckon he's tried every way to disgrace us as he knows."

"'I thought I'd married a man,'" is Mabel's thought, "'and now it seems I've married a Young Man—a Young Man's Christian Association.'"

Robert's love for her became more diffident and beseeching, for its glamours and ardours she had no response, for its doubts and hesitations she had nothing but contempt. "'I believe you'd make me as big a fool as yourself, if you could,'" she said. The people in the district get to the point where they "'wöan't täake any more preaching from a chap wot's bin a byword in the Parish fur loosness this five years.'" So Clem tries to make him "höald his tongue," but he has come to look upon himself as an apostle sent to the Gentiles, so he becomes a tramping Methodist, like the hero of Sheila Kaye-Smith's first book.

"On a warm March Sunday, when the hedges were brushed with green bloom, and the willow catkin made creamy splashes in the brown of the woods, Robert went off to Goudhurst."

Getting tired with his long walk, "he suddenly felt that it would be good to turn out of the lane, and lie down on the earth-smelling grass of one of those big, quiet fields, just where the shadow of the hedge was lacy on the edge of the sunshine . . . to smell the earth, and feel its sweet, living

strength as he lay on it . . . while round him the primrose leaves uncurled, and the spotted leaves of the field orchid broke the green film of their bract, and the warm daisies breathed out a scent that was the caught essence of spring heat and honey . . ." but he pulled himself up short . . . this was the devil tempting him. "He distrusted a yearning for the beauty of the fields . . . of old times he used never to think twice about the country—but since his conversion he had had . . . temptations to turn to mere beauty." The conflict in his mind affected his preaching powers adversely. In the evening he meets a tramp whom he turns from the drink and is seduced by him into sleeping out of doors. "A strange, sweet peace had dropped upon him at last—he had forgotten the rubs and humiliations of his Sabbath . . . but he did not sleep till nearly dawn. The night seemed awake . . . it was full of a living scent of earth and grass, which mixed strangely with the musty dry scent of the hay. There was a continual flutter and whisper in the hedge, queer muffled sounds came from the next field . . . he slept just when the rich blue of the darkness was turning grey."

Mabel was furious with him, but he continued his irregular ministry. "It belonged to the casual nights he spent under the stars—soft purple nights of June, when the horns of the yellow moon burned above the woods, and the air was warm, and thick with the smell of hay. He associated it with the sweet, straggling sunlight of late afternoon or early morning, with village wells, and cool deserted lanes . . . he made no wonderful stir among the people, either for good or evil." He was not stoned at the cross-roads, any more than he was thronged by repentant sinners.

These accounts of his wanderings through Kent and Sussex give Sheila Kaye-Smith a chance to describe more wonderfully and in greater detail than elsewhere the beauties of the nature that she knows and loves so well. In the end he falls in again with the gipsies, and is enticed by them to wrestle with Hannah, his first love, for her soul. He is at first averse from undertaking it: in the end, of course, he does.

"'Oh, Nannie,'" he said, "'God loves you. He's never stopped loving you once, for all you've turned against Him, and the cruel things you've done——'"

Then he knew that he was merely declaring his own love

for her, and calling it God's. . . . He fell on his knees before her, and taking her in his arms, covered her face with kisses. Her husband immediately appears and threatens to blackmail him: "'This is a fine Gospel, and a damn-fine Gospeller.'" He suggests that five pounds might seal their mouths and then——

"'I call five quid nothing for what you've done,'" said Auntie Lovel. "'The other gentleman had to pay ten, and he scarce got hold of Hannah properly. . . .'"

Robert at last sees the trick and nearly kills Hannah's husband, as a result of which he goes to prison, and Mabel seizes the opportunity to go back to the seaside. When he is released from jail Robert goes to live with Clem, a broken man.

"'Sims to me,'" says Polly, "'as Bob's life's lik' a green apple tree—he's picked his fruit lik' other men, but it's bin hard and sour instead of sweet. Love and religion—they're both sweet things, folks say, but with Bob they've bin as the hard green apples.'"

Robert goes to see Mabel and discovers that she wants to cut him right out of her life, and he decides to kill himself. He goes out in the dead of night to do it . . . and finds at last that the love of the soil is too much for him. "The mistrusted earth had been his comfort all through that wonderful year. . . . Memories came to him of footprints in the white dust of Kentish lanes, of big fields tilted to the sunset, of ponds like moons in the night, of dim shapes of villages in a twilight thickened and yellowed by the chaffy mist of harvest, of the spilt glory of big solemn stars, the mystery and the wonder of sounds at night, sounds of animals creeping, sounds of water, sounds of birds. . . . The fields and the farms and the sunrise were calling him . . . 'I am your God—döan't you know me? . . . Didn't you know that I've bin with you all the time? That every time you looked out on the fields . . . you looked on Me? Why wöan't you look and see how beautiful and homely and faithful and loving I am? I'm plighted to you wud the troth of a mother to her child. You lost Me in the mists of your own mind.' . . ."

Once more he is converted. Full of his new Salvation he hastens to enlighten Clem.

"'But now I see as how He's love . . . and He's beauty.

. . . He's in the fields mäaking the flowers grow and the birds sing and the ponds have that lovely liddle white flower growing on 'em. . . .'" Again he decides to convert the world despite Clem's protests. "You can't go every time you're convarted preaching the Gospel about the pläace.'" But he goes . . . and Hannah's husband stirs up the roughs to duck him in a mill pond: they are more thorough than they mean to be and he dies of his injuries.

"'I've a feeling as if I go to the Lord God I'll only be going into the middle of all that's alive . . . if I'm wud Him I can't never lose the month of May.'"

And the last words are fittingly left to Clem and Polly. "'He wur a decent chap, Poll . . . he wur a good chap, the best I've known.'

"'Surelye,' said Polly, 'if Bob had only had sense he might have come to be a saint and martyr—who knows? He had the makings of one; but he had no sense—if he'd had sense he'd be alive now.'

"'Reckon he did wot he thought right.'

"'That's why it's a pity it wurn't sense.'"

This study of a man strange, dignified, real and crystal-clear is not likely quickly to perish. Those who have any trace of the passion for the soil that possesses nearly all the characters in Sheila Kaye-Smith's books, and most Englishmen have it in some degree, will not need to look for any further reason why they should read her novels. All lovers of pure art, all lovers of Nature, all lovers of humanity will find in them satisfaction hardly to be found elsewhere in fiction.

PART III

BOOKS ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

I

A HISTORY OF MODERN COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH—BY H. C. WYLD

I PURPOSELY refrained from saying "Philology" because it has a frightening sound. There is a feeling that the study of literature is directly hostile to a study of Philology, whereas the truth is that, as Professor Wyld says, "*Rightly interpreted, language is a mirror of the minds and manners of those who speak it,*" a point of view which cannot be sufficiently emphasised.

In the old days the study of language meant the chasing of umlaut and the tracking down of ablaut; to-day we find ourselves enticed into the study of modern colloquial English in these words:

> "Together let us beat this ample field,
> Try what the open, what the covert yield;
> The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore,
> Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar;
> Eye nature's walks, shoot folly as it flies,
> And catch the manners living as they rise."

The study of language in H. C. Wyld's *History of Modern Colloquial English* becomes "one line of approach to the Knowledge of Man," and is vastly intriguing.

We find ourselves, for instance, trying to account for the great shifting in pronunciation between the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century in words of the "er" and "ar" type. Why did "sarvice," "vartue," "sarmon" die out, and "Derby," "Berkshire," "clerk" remain? Of course the great factor which nowadays destroys the value of vocabulary as a specific characteristic of a given regional dialect is the migratory habits of the population, and the war will have done more to ruin it than any amount of Elementary Education.

But we are concerned for the moment with curiosities.

Why is "napkin" to be preferred to "serviette"? Why do not people who speak of "the influenza" say "the appendicitis"? Even so great an authority on social propriety as Lord Chesterfield talks of "the head-ach." Where do shop-walkers get their "half-hose," "vest" (for waistcoat), "neckwear," "footwear" and similar words? What has happened to the word "*genteel*"?

"O damn anything that's low"—"The genteel thing is the genteel thing"; but the fun lies in finding out what each age and each individual means or has meant by "genteel" and "low."

It is with a certain sense of surprise that those who have never studied the English Language find that in mediæval times our ancestors gave the alphabet Continental values; those who have a smattering of literary history are equally surprised to find that Chaucer, "the Father of English Literature," did not create the English of Literature; he found it ready to his hand and used it with a gaiety, a freshness, a tenderness and a humanity which has never been surpassed.

Those interested in Literature have ever looked upon the fifteenth century as an arid waste: in language, on the other hand, it is a period of intense importance. For one thing, there is a big increase in the number of people who can write, and therefore in the number of private documents that have come down to us. Freed from the shackles of the professional scribe, writing becomes a listening to actual people speaking, and so we find a great variety of spelling . . . we find that modern English is beginning . . . and there is of course the introduction of printing. It is to these old printers and to these old printers alone that we owe our persistence in clinging to an outworn system of spelling.

For four hundred and fifty years they have dictated to us how we are to spell, and a defence of our existing system which is completely unphonetic is defensible chiefly on the ground of custom, not at all for any pretended historical merit. If only Caxton had been a trifle more enterprising our spelling would have been less widely divorced from the facts of pronunciation.

In the sixteenth century we find that regional dialect disappears completely from the written language of the

South and Midlands—almost every private letter contains a certain number of spellings which throw light upon pronunciation: "the tongue which Shakespeare spake" was the tongue which he wrote: and there is a definite unity between the colloquial language and the language of literature which is after all natural when we think how closely approximated to the action done was every word written by the Elizabethans who one and all seem to have been writers as well as soldiers, statesmen, politicians, sailors, merchant venturers and ambassadors.

"It is not for nothing," says Professor Wyld, "that matters stood thus between the men of letters and the courtiers and the explorers in the age when Literary English was being made, or rather, let us say, when English speech was being put to new uses, and made to express in all its fullness the amazing life of a wonderful age, with all its fresh experiences, thoughts and dreams.

"If anyone doubts whether the language of Elizabethan literature was actually identical with that of everyday life, or whether it was not rather an artful concoction, divorced from the real life of the age, let him, after reading something of the lives and opinions of a few of the great men we have briefly referred to, ask himself whether the picture of Ascham, Wilson, Sidney, or Raleigh posturing and mourning like the Della Cruscans of a later age, is a conceivable one . . . if the speech of the great men we have been considering was unaffected and natural, it certainly was not vulgar. If it be vulgar to say *whot* for *hot*, *stap* for *stop*, *offen* for *often*, *sarvice* for *service*, *venter* for *venture*: if it be slipshod to say *Wensday* for *Wednesday*, *beseechin* for *besecching*, *stricly* for *strictly*, *sounded* for *swooned*, *attemps* for *attempts*, and so on; then it is certain that the Queen herself, and the greater part of her Court, must plead guilty to these imputations."

The individualism in spelling which still to a certain extent prevailed in the sixteenth century enables us to collect from written works, to a far higher degree than at present, the individual habits of speech which the writer possessed. The result of an examination of the writings of this age, from this point of view, is that we see that there existed a greater degree of variety in speech—both in pronunciation and in grammatical forms—than exists now.

One particularly valuable document which Professor Wyld makes use of is the diary of Henry Machyn, a sixteenth-century tradesman who gossips at random in the vernacular of the middle-class Londoner with no particular education or refinement. Like the Wellers, he confuses his *v's* and *w's*: *waeabondes*, *wergers*, *walues*, *welvet*, *woyce*, *voman*, *Vestmynster* are examples. He misplaces his initial aspirates, *alff*, *Amton Courte*, *ard*, *Allallows*, *elmet*, *alpeny*, *hanswered*, *haskyd*, *harme*: his is the largest list of "dropped aspirates" in words of English, not Norman-French, origin which Professor Wyld has found in any document as early as this. *As* as a relative pronoun, *good ons* for *good ones*, *syngyne* for *singing*, *wyche* for *which* and *watt* for *what* are valuable signs. Machyn lets us into more secrets of contemporary speech than does any other writer of his period: he is marvellously emancipated from traditional spelling, which makes him a wonderful guide to the lower type of London English of his time.

When he gets to the seventeenth century the ordinary reader of to-day feels that the writers of that period begin for the first time to speak like men and women of his own age; both in spirit and in substance we have reached our own English; by the time we reach Sir John Suckling and Cowley we scent a colloquial modernity which is altogether foreign to the soaring periods of Milton, the eccentricity of Sir Thomas Browne or the didactic aloofness of Bacon. Dryden was conscious of great differences between the speech of his own time as reflected in writing, especially in the drama, and that of the Elizabethans. He attributes the change and "improvement" to the polish and refinement of Charles II.'s Court. He congratulates himself that "the stiff forms of conversation" had passed away; his charges against the older age are merely charges against the archaic and unfamiliar. To be obsolete in his eyes was to be inferior. Hence his attempt to modernise Chaucer and improve on Shakespeare. These strictures of Dryden about English refer primarily to literature, but they are applicable to the colloquial language. If literary prose style changes it is because the colloquial language has changed first.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century we have Swift's instructive treatises on the English of his day and

of the age before, which is diametrically opposed to Dryden's theories. But it is important to notice that among the hosts of solecisms to which he objects he does not quote what we should expect him to quote. Why does he not mention *Lunnon, Wensday, Chrismas, greatis* (greatest), *respeck, hounes* (hounds)? The reason is that they were so widespread among the best speakers that he himself didn't notice anything wrong with them. His strictures are those of the academic pedant, Dryden's are those of the man of the world.

But for a study of seventeenth-century colloquial English we are directed to the letters in the *Verney Memoirs*. Just as in the sixteenth century Henry Machyn's diary was more to our purpose than the work of any great man, so are the *Verney Papers* in the seventeenth century the eternal joy of the philologist. A large proportion of the letters are written by ladies, and it is from these that we get the greater number of departures from the conventional spelling which shed so much light upon pronunciation. If they spell phonetically it is not because their talk was more careless, but because they read less and were therefore unfamiliar with the orthodox spelling of printed books. To spell badly, it must be remembered, was no fault in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. From them we get this common form of pronouncing *ar* for *er* — *sartinly, desarve, sarvant, sarve, presarve, divartion, larne, marcy*; from them we get *gine* for *join, byled* for *boiled, oblege* for *oblige, seein, missin, comin, disablegin, lemonds, night gownd*; they shorten *have* to *a*; they say *between you and I* and *he is reasonable well agane.*

This free and easy pronunciation and grammar which are characteristic of fashionable English down to the middle of the eighteenth century is partly due to the intimate relation that existed between the ruling classes who visited their estates in the country and came directly into contact with regional speech. "It is just this constant touch with country pursuits and rustic dialect which distinguished, and still distinguishes, the upper classes from the middle-class dwellers in the town."

We owe a good deal to a phonetician called Cooper, whose *Grammatica Anglicana* was published in 1685. From him we see that *line* and *loin* had the same pronun-

ciation. *Ant* and *aunt*, *Rome* and *room*, *Noah's* and *nose*, *Walter* and *water*, *doer* and *door*, *pulls* and *pulse*, *shire* and *shear*—these show us at once how closely the real rustic of to-day gets to the fashionable speech of two hundred years ago. He then gives us pronunciations which he would have his readers avoid as barbarous: *ommost* for *almost*, *wuts* for *oats*, *fut* for *foot*; but it is pleasant to find that Mr Cooper is pleasantly free from that gross and besetting sin of the schoolmaster to describe an ideally "correct" English.

This omission of the "l" (in *Walter*) is extended by another "phonographer" in 1701 to *St Albans*, *Talbot*, *falcon*, *almanac*, *almost*, *Falmouth*, *falter*: apparently too, in his time, the *au* sound which most of us have kept in *sausage* and *because* extended then to *auburn*, *auction*, *audience*, *august*, *aunt*, *austere*, *daunt*, *fault*, *fraud*, *jaundice*, *Paul* and *vault*.

William Baker in 1724 gave us in his *Rules for True Spelling and Writing English*, an instructive list of what he called "words that are commonly pronounced very different from what they are written"! *Stomick*, *spannel*, *Dannel*, *venison*, *medson* are noteworthy.

From the middle of the eighteenth century there are signs of a reaction against a laxity in pronunciation, influenced perhaps by Lord Chesterfield and Doctor Johnson. Johnson, we know, favoured the "regular and solemn" rather than the "cursory and colloquial."

It is to be noticed in passing that all the "reforms" in pronunciation and grammar which have passed into general currency in colloquial English during the last hundred and fifty years have come from below and not from above, in the first instance. This accounts for what some of us look on as the offensive vulgarity of the modern pronunciations of *waistcoat*, *often*, *forehead*, *landscape*, *handkerchief*, due to a wish to speak correctly. So our pronunciation of *gold*, *servant*, *oblige*, *nature*, *London*, *Edward*, etc., would in their turn have struck our grandfathers as offensive vulgarisms.

The later eighteenth century and the early nineteenth seem to have favoured a very serious turn of mind. It is really extraordinary to think of the hold which Jane Austen exerts over us when we come to analyse the total absence of

brilliance, humour, pointedness or charm of any kind that marks the conversation of her characters. The charm and the genius lie in the author's handling of these second-rate people, but she represents them as they actually were. These are actually the conversations of living people. All the little pomposities and reticences, the polite formulas, the unconscious vulgarisms, the well-bred insincerities of the age are here perfectly displayed. The Bennets, D'Arcy's, Wodehouses, etc., pronounced their words *kyard*, *gyearl*, *ojus*, *Injun*, *comin'*, *goin'*, and so on. Lady Catherine de Burgh probably said *Eddard*, *tay*, *chancy*, *ooman*, *neigb'rood*, *lanskip*, *Lunnon*, *cheer* (chair) and perhaps *goold*, *obleege* and *sarvant*.

Professor Wyld quite rightly waxes indignant over the rise of bogus pronunciations, based purely on the spelling, among persons who were ignorant of the best traditional usage until they obtained currency among the better classes. "It would be desirable," he says, "to run these monstrosities to earth, when it would probably appear that many had their origin among ignorant teachers of pronunciation." "It would be an interesting inquiry," he says in another place, "how far the falling off in the quality of prose style among the generality of writers after the third quarter of the eighteenth century is related to social developments. An East Indian director is said to have told Charles Lamb (of all men!) that the style the Company most appreciated was the humdrum, thus doubtlessly voicing the literary ideals of the rising class of bankers, brokers, and nabobs whose point of view was largely to dominate English taste for several generations."

It is worth remembering that the change in pronunciation of a host of words like *heat*, *meat*, *eat*, *ease*, *sea*, *speak*, *cheat*, *dream*, *deceit* from *hate*, *mate*, *ate*, *ase*, *say* and so on is not in the nature of a sound change, but is merely the abandonment of one type of pronunciation, and the adoption of another, a very common phenomenon.

It was a visit to *The Beggar's Opera* that made me think the following sentence worthy of comment. The present-day vulgarism of dropping the initial aspirate was not widespread much before the end of the eighteenth century, and it made one wince to hear an otherwise good actor so far go out of his part as to drop "h's" where the original would

never have done so. The restoration of an aspirate in *humour* is a trick of yesterday. The gap in the evidence between Machyn and two hundred years later is remarkable. The practice which did exist in Machyn's day in London must have been confined to a limited class. The wrong addition of *h* is far more noticeable.

In a most diverting final chapter Professor Wyld dilates on colloquial idiom, and reminds us how impossible it would be for us, if we were transported into the sixteenth century, to know how to greet or take leave of those we met, how to express our thanks suitably, how to ask a favour, pay a compliment or send a polite message to a gentleman's wife. We should be at a loss how to begin and end the simplest note, whether to a friend, relative or stranger. We should hesitate every moment how to address the person we were talking to.

Readers of Ford Madox Hueffer's *Ladies whose Bright Eyes,* and those who saw *When Knights were Bold,* will realise what infinite amusement can be called up by imagining oneself driven to talk on level terms with our ancestors.

Professor Wyld opens up the subject by giving characteristic specimens of modes of greeting, farewells, compliments, endearments, angry speeches, oaths, affectations and so on, all of which are entertaining and enlightening. We find, for instance, most of our modern formulas in letter-writing in use before the end of the first half of the seventeenth century.

For anyone in the least interested in the sources and development of his own language there is no book which will whet his appetite to pursue the subject still more deeply than Professor Wyld's History. It has the added advantage that scholars will find in it plenty of material for further research ; but everyone should read it for the flood of light it sheds on what we fondly imagined to be good taste, on what is falsely thought to be "the correct thing," and most of all because it shows us still another way of "catching the manners" of other ages "living as they rise."

II

THE ROMANCE OF WORDS—BY ERNEST WEEKLEY

PROFESSOR WEEKLEY interests us in philology no less than Professor Wyld, but he treads an entirely different path. His aim is to select the unexpected in etymology, to show us the close connection between *jilt* and *Juliet*, to trace *assegai* back to Chaucer, to explain the true meaning of phrases like *curry favour*, which really means the combing down of a horse of a particular colour.

The result of this system is that we begin for ourselves to eye every word with suspicion, and work out by ourselves reasons why *trivial* means *commonplace* (it can be picked up anywhere, at the meet of "three ways," *trivium*), and so on.

Why are the series of monosyllables by which notes are indicated, do, re, mi, fa, so, la ? They are supposed to be taken from a Latin hymn :

> "*Ut* (*do*) queant laxis *re*sonare fibris
> *Mi*ra questorum *fa*muli tuorum
> *Sol*ve polluti *la*bü reatum
> Sancte Iohannes . . ."

Professor Weekley invites us to watch words as they travel, an amusing game.

Apricot starts in mediæval Greek, through vulgar Latin as *præcox* (early ripe), through Arabia. It first crossed the Adriatic, passed on to Asia Minor or the north coast of Africa, and then travelling along the Mediterranean re-entered Southern Europe. *Carat* does much the same, being a corruption through French, Italian and Arabic of the Greek κεράτιον (fruit of the locust-tree, little horn). *Hussar* is a doublet of *corsair*, and has travelled a long way since the separation first took place. The *cocoa* of *cocoa-nut* is a Spanish baby word for a bogey-man.

Then there are words of popular manufacture like

ortolan, *guinea-pig* (which is not a pig and does not come from Guinea), *parrot* ("little Peter"), *pinchbeck* and *nicotine* (from the names of men), and so on.

Phonetic accidents account for many vagaries, as we see only too commonly with the letter "*h*." It is noteworthy that in Imperial Rome educated people sounded the aspirate, while it completely disappeared from the everyday language of the lower classes, the vulgar Latin from which the Romance languages are descended, so far as their working vocabulary is concerned.

That is why the Romance languages have no aspirate. Our "educated" *h* in modern English is mainly artificial, as we saw before: cf. *Armitage* with *hermitage*.

Then there are sound changes by assimilation, dissimilation and metathesis: the *lime* and *linden* is an example of the first; *tankard* for *cantar*, *wattle* and *wallet* examples of the third. Some words shrink, like *Spittlegate* near Grantham for *hospital gate*, *gin* for *Geneva*, *grog* from the admiral who wore *grogram* breeches, *navvy* for *navigator*. Words have a habit too of completely changing their meaning. *Treacle* used for *balm* in Coverdale's Bible from *theriaca*, a remedy against snake-bite, a *lumber*-room is really a *Lombard* room, where the pawnbrokers stored pledged property.

Adjectives are especially subject to change. *Quaint* used to mean *acquaint*; *restive* used to mean standing stock still; *smug* used to mean trim, elegant, beautiful; *homely* used to mean ugly, disagreeable, coarse.

Miniature ought to mean something painted in *minium* (red lead).

The original *scavenger* was an important official.

There is too the study of semantics—the science of meanings as distinguished from phonetics, the science of sound.

The *exchequer* is really a *chess-board*; *chancel* a *cross-bar*, so *cancel*.

The study of metaphors is a little startling, when we find that to "take the cake" is paralleled by the Greek λαβεῖν τὸν πυραμοῦντα, and that "to lose the *ship* for a ha'porth of tar" is merely dialect for *sheep*. Tar is used as a medicine for sheep.

Folk etymology is worth spending time over, if only to discover such things as the derivation of *humble-pie*,

a pie made from the *umbles* of a stag; *umpire* (non per), not equal; *ramper*, causeway, a doublet of *rampart*; *purley*, a strip of disforested woodland from *pour-allée*; *taffrail* from *tafel*, picture; *posthumous*, from *postumus*, latest-born. *Witch-elm* has nothing to do with witches; it is for *weech-elm*, the bent elm.

Ignorance of the true meaning of a word leads to vain repetitions: *greyhound* means *hound-hound*; *Buckhurst Holt Wood* means beech wood wood wood; a *cheerful face* means a face full of face.

And before taking leave of us and sending us off on a thousand different scents of our own in chase of words Professor Weekley warns us to preserve the rules of the hunt. A sound etymology must not violate the recognised laws of sound change (these may be found in Professor Wyld's book); the development of meaning must be clearly traced, and it must start from the earliest or fundamental sense of the word.

With the few delicious examples that I have quoted before you, multiplied by a thousand in *The Romance of Words*, this is a game to send you into ecstasies, and one of which you can never tire.

III

THE ROMANCE OF NAMES—BY ERNEST WEEKLEY

THIS companion volume to *The Romance of Words* is no less diverting. It is just one branch of the hunt, and perhaps the most interesting one to start with. We find mythical etymologies like that of the Napiers of Merchiston who took the motto *n'a pier* ("has no equal"), whereas their ancestors were the servants who looked after the napery. Not all the *Seymours* are *St Maurs*. Some of them were once *Seamers—i.e.* tailors.

The ff in *ffrench* and *ffoulkes* is sheer affectation, as the *ff* is merely the method of indicating the capital letter in early documents. The telescoping of long names leads to trouble among the ignorant. Auchinleck, *Affleck*; Postlethwaite, *Posnett*; Wolstenholme, *Woosnam* are good examples of this.

It is well to be reminded, for the sake of those who bear "hideous names," of the following facts. Matthew Arnold in his essay on the *Function of Criticism at the Present Time* is moved by the case of *Wragg* to this:

"What a touch of grossness in our race, what an original shortcoming in the more delicate spiritual perceptions, is shown by the natural growth amongst us of such hideous names—*Higginbottom, Stiggins, Bugg.*"

As a matter of fact, *Wragg* is the first element in the heroic Ragnar; *Bugg* is the Anglo-Saxon Bucga; *Stiggins* is the illustrious Stigand, and *Higginbottom* is purely geographical.

We owe a great many of our names in disguise to the paladins and of course to the Bible. *Pankhurst* is Pentecost, *Chubb* and *Jupp* are derived from Job, *Cradock* from Caradoc (Caractacus), *Maddox* from Madoc, *Izzard* from Isolt, *Rome* from Roland,

Metronymics, as Professor Weekley hastens to assure us, are not always a sign of moral depravity: in mediæval times the children of a widow often assumed the mother's name.

From Matilda we get Tillotson, from Beatrice Betts, from Isabel Ibbotson, from Avice Haweis.

With regard to local surnames we have to accustom ourselves to the idea that the name of a county, town or village was acquired when the locality was left. *Scott* is an English name, *English* or *Inglis* is Scottish; *Cornish* and *Cornwallis* first became common in Devonshire, *French* and *Francis* are English . . . for the same reason *Cutler* is a rare name in Sheffield. The great exception *Curnow* in Cornwall may stand for those who could only speak the old Cornish language.

Morris (Moorish) is probably a nickname due to complexion.

> "In *ford*, in *ham*, in *ley* and *tun*
> The most of English surnames run."

It is true that we owe many names to "spots." It is curious how *Field*, *Lake*, *Pool*, *Spring*, *Street* and *Marsh* persist in the singular, while *Meadows*, *Rivers*, *Mears*, *Wells*, *Rhodes* and *Myers* hang on to the plural. So we get *Nokes*, but *Nash*: monosyllables tend to the plural. There are certain Celtic words connected with scenery—*Lynn*, *Carrick*, *Craig* are common examples.

Beerbohm Tree is pleonastic, meaning pear-tree tree. *Thackeray* means the corner where the thatch was stored. *Kellogg* is derived from kill hog. *Cazenove* and *Newbolt* have the same meaning. *Rothschild* means red shield, *Hawtrey* comes from Hauterive, but Norman ancestry is not always to be assumed because we find French spot-names so common in England (*Neville*, *Villiers*, etc.). *Boyes* and *Boyce* may spring from a man of pure English descent who happened to be described *del bois* instead of *atte wood*, but this is rare. *Roach* is not a fish-name, but corresponds to *Delaroche*. *Pew*, if not *Ap Hugh*, was a *Dupuy*.

Occupative names become a natural surname, but *Knight* is not always knightly, for Anglo-Saxon *cuiht* means servant; *Labouchère* was the lady butcher, *Cordner* the worker in Cordovan leather; *Muir* was *le muur*, who had charge of the mews in which the hawks were kept while moulting. *Reader* and *Booker* have nothing to do

with literature: the former thatched, the latter was a butcher.

Professor Weekley devotes one whole chapter to show the difficulties that beset the etymologist in his search to derive one single word accurately. The specimen name he takes is *Rutter*, which he eventually traces to fiddler.

From the lower orders of the church we get *Lister*, a reader; *Bennet*, an exoreist; and *Collet*, an acolyte.

In trades we get *Fuller* in the south, *Tucker* (toucher) in the west, and *Walker* in the north. *Secker* means sack-maker, *Parmenter* a parchmenter, *Pargater* a dauber, *Straker* a maker of tires. *Grieve*, *Graves* and *Greaves* was a land agent, *Coster* dealt in costards—*i.e.* apples; *Jagger* worked draught-horses for hire; *Stewart* was the sty-ward; *Todhunter* hunted the fox; *Toller* collected the tolls.

Among nicknames *Earnes* means uncle, and *Neave* nephew. Who would recognise *Halfpenny* in *MacAlpine*? *Coffin* means bald, *Lloyd* grey, and Russell red; *Oliphant* elephant; *Hinks*, from Hengst, a stallion; *Stott*, a bullock; *Luttrell*, an otter; *Talbot*, a hound; *Colfox*, a black fox; *Fitch*, a polecat.

Fish-names are usually not genuine.

IV

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE—BY LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

THERE are few of us so learned that we can afford to dispense with the aid given by the small volumes in the Home University Library in any subject, and Mr Pearsall Smith's philological book is one of the most informative and interesting of the series.

Here we learn of the tendency in English to put the accent on borrowed French words on the first syllable when we decide to pronounce them in our own way: later borrowings are accented according to what we imagine the native pronunciation to be: so we get *gentle*, *dragon*, *gállant*, *baron*, *button* and *mutton* of old time against the newer words *genteel*, *dragoon*, *gallânt*, *buffoon*, *cartoon*, *balloon*. In like manner words like *message* and *cabbage* show their antiquity when compared with *massage*, *mirage* and *prestige*. *Police* has kept its English accent only in Ireland and Scotland.

Mr Pearsall Smith, like Professor Wyld, has much to say against the pedants, and shows us how letters like the *b* in *debt*, the *l* in *fault*, the *p* in *receipt*, the *d* in *advance* and *advantage*, the *c* in *scent* and *scissors* have been inserted incorrectly by English scholars who ought to have known better.

In the course of an enthusiastic defence of a mixed language as against a pure national home-bred speech he makes the valuable point that we are richer than most nations in that we can express subtle shades of difference of meaning, of emotional significance between such pairs of words as *paternal* and *fatherly*, *fortune* and *luck*, *celestial* and *heavenly*, *royal* and *kingly* by reason of this intermixture of foreign elements.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book is on "Makers of English Words," which gives us yet another avenue of approach to the study of the language.

Not only interesting, but surprising, are some of the

results gleaned from this: that Sir Isaac Newton was the first to use *centrifugal* and *centripetal*; that Jeremy Bentham coined *international*; Huxley was responsible for *Agnostic*; *cyclone* was created in 1848 by a meteorologist, but *anti-cyclone* had to wait for Sir Francis Galton. Whewell invented *scientist* and Macaulay was responsible for *constituency*. Other words created in the nineteenth century are *Eurasian*, *esogamy*, *folklore*, *hypnotism*, *telegraph*, *telephone*, *photograph* and a host of other scientific terms. To go back to the classics: we owe the formation of many new words to Sir Thomas Browne, among them *hallucination*, *insecurity*, *retrogression*, *precarious*, *antediluvian*. Milton coined *infinitude*, *liturgical*, *gloom*, *pandemonium*, *echoing*, *rumoured*, *moonstruck*, *Satanic*. Shakespeare coined more than all the rest of the poets put together. To Coverdale and Tindale we owe a great number of new compounds, like *loving-kindness*, *long-suffering*, *broken-hearted*. It is delightful to think that we owe *irascibility* to Doctor Johnson, *persiflage* and *etiquette* to Lord Chesterfield, *bored* and *blasé* to *Byron*, *colonial* and *diplomacy* to Burke, and *pessimism* to Coleridge. After Keats (whose creations are miniature poems in themselves) there is a remarkable decline in word-creation.

Two valuable chapters are devoted to "Language and History," in which we find how far the evolution of our race and civilisation is embodied in our vocabulary —"A contradiction between history and language rarely or never occurs"—and a further chapter on "Language and Thought" is of extraordinary interest in showing us what words we must delete from our vocabulary if we wish to enter into the spirit and popular consciousness of the Middle Ages, that world of supernatural purposes and interventions. All sense of past and future would drop from us. Our thoughts would be absorbed entirely by immediate practical considerations. We should feel imprisoned, though we might feel more dignified. With the Renaissance we should expand enough to observe our fellows: a century later we should turn to the study of ourselves.

"The change of thought from one generation to another does not depend so much on new discoveries as on the gradual shifting, into the centre of vision, of ideas and

feelings that had been but dimly realised before. And it is just this shifting—this change, so important and yet so elusive—which is marked and dated in the history of language."

There was once an American writer who said: "You commend or condemn yourself by your regular choice of words . . . don't use such commonplace words as grab, bet, awful, says, worst, boss, monkeying, job, ain't, tackled, floored, bicker, rumpus, shindy, hunk, fellow, drub, henpecked, blubber, spout, pickings, croak, swipe, swap, handy, fluster, nasty, hankering, flabbergasted, highfalutin. . . . Are you familiar with such *desirable* words as lassitude, flamboyant, nascent, legendary, perennial, Nemesis, cryptic, brooding, imperturbable, disenchanted, belated, cleavage, august, clarity, demarcation, indigenous, cloistered, malevolent?"

Well, if you agree with him (and there are people who do) it's quite time you started to read some books on the English Language, and if you don't it means that you already understand the delights of philology and you will need no further encouragement to read the four books I have mentioned, if you have not already done so.

PART IV

CERTAIN FOREIGNERS

I

MONTAIGNE

I BEGIN with the third book of Essays because I happened, for the purposes of writing about him, to re-read that first. And on the first page we find our reason for reading him: "I speake unto Paper as to the first man I meete." "These are but my fantasies," he says in another place, "by which I endevour not to make things known, but myselfe" . . . and truly that is the whole matter. We do not read Montaigne to learn anything, but to make a friend. No man was ever so completely unashamed or so completely honest in his depiction of himself:

"All contrarieties are found in me, according to some turne or removing, and in some fashion or other; shamefast, bashfull, insolent, chaste, luxurious, peevish, pratling, silent, fond, doting, labourious, nice, delicate, ingenious, slow, dull, froward, humorous, debonaire, wise, ignorant, false in words, true-speaking, both liberall, covetous and prodigall."

Though this list is pretty long, it omits the most delightful quality of all. Ingenuous is the first word we apply to Montaigne. His pages sparkle with naïve statements. "I will follow the best side to the fire, but not into it, if I can choose. If neede require, let Montaigne my Mannor-house be swallowed up in publike ruine: but if there be no such necessity, I will acknowledge my selfe beholding unto fortune if she please to save it. . . . Verily I could easily for a neede bring a candle to St Michaell, and another to his Dragon," from which we may safely assume that Montaigne owes much of his happy-go-lucky, care-free nature to his wisdom in not embroiling himself in public affairs. "I speake truth, not my belly-full, but as much as I dare," he says, and what follows may account for the greater pleasure we derive from his later essays . . . "and I dare the more the more I grow into yeares. . . . I teach not: I report." Of the effect of his work we read: "In

my climate of Gascoigne they deeme it a jest to see mee in print. . . . In Guienne I pay Printers, in other places they pay mee."

One of the most delectable essays in this third book is on Repentance, where we read: "Were I to live againe it should be as I have already lived: I neither deplore what is past, nor dread what is to come" . . . the philosophy of a sane man in whom cheerfulness keeps on breaking forth: "It is one of the chiefest points wherein I am beholden to fortune, that in the course of my bodies estate, each thing hath been carried in season. . . . I therefore renounce these casuall and dolourous reformations. . . . A man cannot boast of contemning or combating sensuality if hee see her not, or know not her grace, her force, and most attractive beauties . . . in truth we abandon not vices so much as we change them."

In the next chapter he pleads (it is one of his favourite subjects) for mutability. "We must not cleave so fast unto our humours and dispositions. . . . The goodliest mindes are those that have most variety and pliablenesse in them. . . . Life is a motion unequall, irregular, and multiforme." Books, he would have us believe, seduce us from study, but "Meditation is a large and powerfull study to such as vigorously can taste and employ themselves therein. I had rather forge than furnish my minde." So he reads to busy his judgment, not his memory. Of the three commerces or Societies which he would indulge in, discourse with friends, intercourse with fair women ("a sweet commerce for me"), and recourse unto books, he writes: "The first is troublesome and tedious for its raritie, the second withers with old age, the third is much more solid-sure and much more ours . . . it comforts me in age and solaceth me in solitarinesse; it easeth mee of the burthen of a weary-some sloth; and at all times rids me of tedious companies: it abateth the edge of fretting sorrow. . . . I never travel without bookes, nor in peace nor in warre: yet doe I passe many dayes and moneths without using them. It shall be anon, say I, or to-morrow, or when I please; in the meanewhile the time runnes away, and passeth without hurting me." He gives us exact details of the dimensions of his library, where he turns over "by peece-meales," "now one booke and now

another." This is his private sanctuary. "Miserable in my minde is he who in his owne home hath nowhere to be to him selfe." But he urges as the great objection to reading that "the minde is therein exercised, but the body remaineth there whilst without action, and is wasted and ensorrowed. I know no excesse more hurtfull for me, nor more to be avoided by me, in this declining age."

Of his attitude to women, which is exactly that of Donne in his early days, we hear much. In his amours he likes to set an edge on his pleasures "by difficultie, by desire, and for some glory . . . surely glittering pearles and silken cloathes adde some-thing unto it, and so doe titles, nobilitie and a worthie traine. . . . Something may be done without the graces of the minde, but little or nothing without the corporall . . . but it is a society wherein it behooveth a man somewhat to stand upon his guard." In chapter four, on *Diverting and Diversions*, he dwells on the importance of little things in life: "The remembrance of a farewell, of an action, of a particular grace, or of a last commendation afflict us," when we miss not at all the big thing. "Cæsar's gowne disquicted all Rome, which his death had not done." . . . "The teares of a Lacquey, the distributing of my cast sutes, the touch of a knowne hand, an ordinary consolation, doth disconsolate and intender me." Which draws him to the brave and totally unexpected conclusion: "It is the right way to prize one's life at the right worth of it to forgo it for a dreame." In chapter five, *Upon Some Verses of Virgil*, he amplifies at enormous length what he said in an earlier chapter about the fascination of fair women.

It is a trick of his to give headings to his chapters which are wholly misleading, but it would be hard anywhere to find a parallel for so innocent a title for so deliciously frank a discussion.

"From the excesse of jollity," he begins, "I am falne into the extreame of severity . . . therefore, I do now of purpose somewhat give way unto licentious allurements." This is an understatement . . . "As I have heretofore defended my selfe from pleasure, so I now ward my selfe from temperance . . . wisdom hath hir excesses, and no lesse need of moderation than follie." So he attempts to amuse himself with the remembrance of past "youth-

tricks," and to judge from the length of the chapter he found that the amusement did not quickly pall. It certainly does not pall on us.

"I take hold of even of the least occasions of delight I can meet with all . . . I am ready to leape for joy, as at the receaving of some unexspected favour, when nothing grieveth me": and he discredits those who will attack his licence before he starts: "Few I know will snarle at the liberty of my writings, that have not more cause to snarle at their thoughts-looseness." . . . "For my part I am resolved to dare speake whatsoever I dare do . . . the worst of my actions . . . seeme not so ugly unto me as I finde it both ugly and base not to dare to avouch them. . . . A ly is in mine opinion worse than leachery." "I greedily long to make my selfe knowne, nor care I at what rate, so it be truly . . . in farewels we heate above ordinary our affections to the things we forgo. I here take my last leave of this world's pleasures: loe here our last embraces. And now to our theame."

He objects to the conspiracy of silence which rules on this subject and proceeds to lay down rules for happy marriages. "A good marriage (if any there be) refuseth the company and conditions of love; it endevoureth to present those of amity. It is a sweete society of life, full of constancy, of trust . . ." but "few men have wedded their sweet hearts, their paramours or mistresses, but have come home by weeping Crosse, and ere long repented their bargaine . . . we then love without disturbance to our selves; two divers and in themselves contrary things . . . it is no longer love, be it once without Arrowes or without fire. The liberality of Ladies is to profuse in marriage, and blunts the edge of affection and desire." With regard to the innocence of the other sex on these matters he is completely sceptical. "Heare them relate how we sue, how we wooe, how we sollicitie, and how we entertaine them, they will soone give you to understand that we can say, that we can doe, and that we can bring them nothing but what they already knew, and had long before digested without us." . . . "It is folly to go about to bridle women of a desire so fervent and so naturall in them."

It is in this chapter (Montaigne is world-famous for irrelevancies) that he gives us his finest panegyric on

Plutarch, his favourite author, and then goes on as usual to reveal more of himself . . . "for all matters are linked one to another." We learn, for instance, of his fondness for riding and for travelling alone: he quickly veers round again to the subject, however. . . . "Leaving bookes aside . . . when all is done I find that love is nothing else but an insatiate thirst of enjoying a greedily desired subject." He returns with redoubled vigour to the delight of describing this desire: "The more steps and degrees there are, the more delight and honour is there on the top . . . it is the deare price makes viands savour the better. . . . I love gradation and prolonging in the distribution of their favours."

"Philosophie contends not against naturall delights, so that due measure bee joyned therewith; and alloweth the moderation, not the shunning of them."

There is wisdom in this: "May we not say that there is nothing in us, during this earthly prison, simply corporall, or purely spirituall?" So he would not have the body follow its appetites to the mind's prejudice or damage and vice versa. He then pronounces a noble pæan in praise of love: "I have no other passion that keeps mee in breath . . . it restores me the vigilancy, sobriety, grace and care of my person . . . assures my countenance against the wrinckled frowns of age . . . reduces me to serious, sound and wise studies, whereby I might procure more love, purges my minde from despaire, diverts me from thousands of irksome tedious thoughts. . . ."

But he realises that age has to give place to youth: "They have both strength and reason on their side. . . . If women can do us no good but in pittie, I had much rather not to live at all than to live by almes . . ." and so concludes a noble essay of some eighty pages: it is as unexpectedly frank as Mrs Asquith's *Autobiography*, and just as delightful: of both it might with equal truth be said: "It is only hurtfull unto fooles." In chapter six, *Of Coaches*, he shows us his own natural courage. "There is nothing doth sooner cast us into dangers than an inconsiderate greediness to avoide them."

"Nature having disarmed me of strength, hath armed me with insensibility, and a regular or soft apprehension. I cannot long endure to ride either in coach or litter, or to go

in a boat—an interrupted and broken motion offends me" and then (typically) goes on to describe with immense relish the wonders of Mexico and Peru. In the essay on *The Incommoditie of Greatnesse* he confesses to a lack of personal ambition: "I should love my selfe better to be the second or third man in Perigot than the first in Paris . . . mediocrity best fitteth me." That on *The Art of Conferring* contains more personal confessions. "The horror of cruelty draws me nearer unto clemency then any patterne of clemency can ever win me . . . being but little instructed by good examples, I make use of bad" before he comes to his subject: "The most fruitfull and naturall exercise of our spirit is, in my selfe—pleasing conceit, conference . . . no propositions amaze me, no conceit woundeth me, what contrariety soever they have to mine. There is no fantazie so frivolous or humor so extravagant, that in mine opinion is not sortable to the production of humane wit." He immediately dashes off at a tangent to discuss fond conceits: "Meseemeth I may well be excused if I rather except an odde number than an even: Thursday in respect of Friday . . . if when I am travelling I would rather see a Hare coasting than crossing my way; and rather reach my left than my right foote to be shod."

The matter in debate affects him not at all, the manner is all: "It is not force nor subtilty that I so much require, as forme and order." As usual he has scant respect for the pedants: "I had rather my child should learne to speake in a Taverne than in the schooles of well-speaking Art." . . . "I dayly ammuse my selfe to read in authors, without care of their learning; therein seeking their manner, not their subject." . . . "Let but a man looke who are the mightiest in Cities and who thrive best in their businesse: he shall commonly find they are the siliest and poorest in wit." It is in this essay that he compares Tacitus so excellently with Seneca.

In the chapter *Of Vanitie* we hear much more of himself: "My chiefest profession in this life was to live delicately and quietly and rather negligently then seriously. . . . I am no Philosopher . . . life is a tender thing, and easie to be distempered. . . ."

"Neither the pleasure of building . . . nor hunting, nor

hawking, nor gardens . . . can much embusie me or greatly ammuse me. It is a thing for which I hate my selfe. . . . Those who hearing mee relate mine own insufficiencie in matters pertaining to husbandry or thrift, are still whispering in mine eares that it is but a kinde of disdaine, and that I neglect to know the implements or tooles belonging to husbandry or tillage, their seasons and orders; how my wines are made, how they graft, and understand or know the names and formes of hearbes . . . and what belongs to the dressing of meats wherewith I live and whereon I feede; the names and prices of such stuffes I cloath my selfe withall, onely because I doe more seriously take to heart some higher knowledge; bring me in a manner to death's doore . . . I would rather be a cunning horseman than a good Logician."

I like his attitude to his servants: "I never presume vices but after I have seene them . . . it is not amisse if you allow your servant some small scope for his disloyalty and indiscretion."

I like his attitude to money: "I had rather heare at two months end that I have spent foure hundred crownes, then every night when I should goe to my quiet bed have mine eares tired and my minde vexed with three, five, or seven."

"What would I not rather doe then reade a contract?"

"In mine owne house I exactly looke unto necessitie, little unto state, and lesse unto ornament. . . ."

"Over-many parts are required in hoarding and gathering of goods: I have no skill in it."

He has a good deal to say against the Government, as all men in all ages have: "Our Common-wealth is much crazed and out of tune . . . the gods play at hand-ball with us, and tosse us up and downe on all hands," but "all that shaketh doth not fall"; but he comes back very soon to what interests him far more than nationalities, princedoms, potentates or powers—himself: he doubts whether the passage of years had added one inch of wisdom to him . . . he tells us that he has a thousand times gone to bed imagining that he would be killed in the night: he pats himself on the back for his nice scrupulousness in the keeping of promises, he shows us a side of his nature which was wholly foreign to any other man of his time when he

expresses his humour "to esteeme all men as my countrymen," he extols travel as a profitable exercise and tells us that in spite of his cholic he can sit ten hours on horseback "without wearinesse or tyring." "I love rainy and durty weather as duckes doe" . . . "these Umbrels . . . doe more weary the armes then ease the head." . . . "It is a hard matter to make me resolve of any journey; but if I be once on the way, I hold out as long and as farre as another. I strive as much in small as I labour in great enterprises. . . ."

He seems to excuse himself for leaving home so often, being married: "They doe me wrong. The best time for a man to leave his house is when he hath so ordered and settled the same that it may continue without him. . . . I require in a maried woman the Occonomicall vertue above all others." Besides, "Jovisance and possession appertaine chiefly unto imagination. It embraceth more earnestly and uncessantly what she goeth to fetch, then what wee touch. Summon and count all your daily ammusements and you shall finde you are then furthest and most absent from your friend when he is present with you . . . verely that woman who can prescribe unto her husband how many steps end that which is neere, and which steps in number begins the distance she counts farre, I am of opinion that she stay him betweene both." It reads very much as if Montaigne had had to use that argument with his own wife. "We did not condition when we were maried, continually to keepe ourselves close hugging one another." He rises to a sublimer thought shortly after this:

"I undertake (my journey) not either to returne or to perfect the same. I onely undertake it to be in motion. So long as the motion pleaseth me, and I walke that I may walke. Those runne not that runne after a Benefice or after a Hare," and this leads him to scorn the fear of dying away from home. "If I were to chuse, I thinke it should rather be on horsebacke than in a bed, from my home and farre from my friends. . . . Let us live, laugh and be merry amongst our friends, but die and yeeld up the ghost amongst strangers and such as we know not."

"I dayly endeavour . . . to shake off this childish humour . . . which causeth . . . that we desire to moove our friends to compassion and sorrow for us."

"A man should, as much as he can, set foorth and extend his joy, but to the utmost of his power suppresse and abridge his sorrow. . . ." Again he turns off at a tangent: "A pleasant fantazie is this of mine, many things I would be loath to tell a particular man, I utter to the whole world. And concerning my most secret thoughts and inward knowledge, I send my dearest friends to a Stationers shop. . . . I would willingly come from the other world to give him the lie that should frame me other than I had beene; were it he meant to honour mee."

So he goes on to explain himself: "I trace no certaine line, neither right nor crooked . . . bee my meate boyled, rosted, or baked; butter or oyle, and that of Olives or of wall-nuts, hot or colde, I make no difference, all is one to me. . . . One string alone can never sufficiently hold me. . . . I must walke with my penne as I goe with my feete. The common high way must have conference with other wayes. . . . Libertie and idlenesse are my chiefest qualities." He realises that he frequently straggles out of the path in his discourse, but contends that "some word or other shall ever be found in a corner that hath relation to it, though closely couched." He explains also why his later essays are much longer than his earlier ones: "The often breaking of my chapters . . . seemed to interrupt attention before it be conceived," and he ends the essay on a magnificent note:

"You distract yourselves," said the God of Delphos, "call yourselves home again . . . except thy selfe, O man, everything doth first seeke and study it selfe . . . there's not one so shallow, so empty, and so needy as thou art who embraecst the whole world. Thou art the Scrutator without knowledg, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and when all is done, the vice of the play.'

In chapter ten, *How One Ought to Governe his Will*, he pleads for moderation and irrelevantly curses the Pope for "eclipsing or abridging tenne days" in the calendar.

Again and again he returns to this love of his for moderation in all things. "We need not much learning for to live at ease . . . all our suffieiency that is beyond the naturall is well nigh vaine and superfluous. . . . I have no care at all to acquire or get . . . apprehension doth not greatly presse me . . . I ever carry my preservatives above me,

which are resolution and sufferance . . . we finde nothing so swecte in life as a quiet rest and gentle sleepe and without dreames."

So long as he can keep his accustomed hours, eat his accustomed meals at the usual time, he is satisfied. Little things put him out. "If my minde be busie alone, the least stirring, yea, the buzzing of a flie doth trouble and distemper the same." On the other hand: "With small adoe and without compulsion, I can easily leave mine inclinations and embrace the contrary . . . there is no course of life so weake and sottish as that which is mannaged by Order, Methode, and Discipline." "To be tied to one certaine particular fashion," he calls a "most contrary quality." . . . "Let such men keep their kitchin."

He immediately returns to himself: "Without long practise I can neither sleepe by day, nor eate betweene meales . . . nor get children but before I fall asleepe . . . nor leave mine owne sweate, nor quench my thirst either with cleere water or wine alone, nor continue long bareheaded, nor have mine hair cut after dinner. I could as hardly spare my gloves as my shirt . . . or lye in a bed without curtaines about it. I could dine without a tablecloth, but hardly without a cleane napkin . . . when others goe to breakefast, I goe to sleepe, and within a while after I shall be as fresh and jolly as before . . . both in sicknesse and in health I have willingly given my selfe over to those appetites that pressed me . . . I never received harme by any action that was very pleasing unto me. . . . A man must give sicknesses their passage . . . let Nature worke: let hir have hir will . . . pleasure is one of the chiefest kinds of profit. . . . Do but endure, you neede no other rule or regiment. . . . Sleeping hath possessed a great part of my life: and as old as I am, I can sleepe eight or nine houres together. . . . I love to take my rest with my legs as high or higher then my seate. . . . I seldome dreame, and when I doe, it is of extravagant things and chymeras, commonly produced of pleasant conceits, rather ridiculous than sorrowfull. And thinke it true that dreames are the true interpreters of our inclinations; but great skill is required to sort and understand them. . . . I feed much upon salt cakes, and love to have my bread somewhat fresh. . . . Never take unto your selfe, and much lesse

never give your wives the charge of your childrens breeding or education. . . . Let custome enure them to frugality and breed them to hardnesse: that they may rather descend from a sharpenesse than ascend unto it. . . . My father chose no other gossips to hold me at the font than men of abject and base fortune, that so I might the more be bound and tied unto them . . . long sitting at meales doth much weary and distemper me . . . in mine owne house, though my board be but short and that wee use not to sit long, I doe not commonly sit downe with the first, but a pretty while after others . . . such as have care of me may easily steale from me what soever they imagine may be hurtfull for me, inasmuch as about my feeding I never desire or find fault with that I see not. . . . But if a dish or any thing else be once set before me, they lose their labour that goe about to tell me of abstinence. . . . I love all manner of flesh or fowle but greene rosted . . . and in divers of them the very alteration of their smell." He keeps his teeth in condition by rubbing them with his napkin before and after meals. "I am not over-much or greedily desirous of sallets or of fruits, except melons . . . am gluttonous of fish . . . for a man of an ordinary stature I drinke indifferent much . . . I like little glasses best . . . I feare a foggy and thicke ayre, and shunne smoke more than death . . . to allay the whiteness of paper, when I was most given to reading, I was wont to lay a piece of greene glass upon my booke, and was thereby much eased. Hitherto I never used spectacles . . . and can yet see as farre as ever I could . . . I must like that preacher well that can tie mine attention to a whole sermon . . . I hate that we should be commanded to have our minds in the clouds whilst our bodies are sitting at the table. . . . When I dance, I dance; and when I sleepe, I sleepe."

The fundamental principle of life he finds is to live. "The glorious masterpiece of man is to live to the repulse. . . . All other things—as to reigne, to governe, to hoard up treasure, to thrive, and to build—are for the most part but appendixes and supports thereunto . . . it is for base and petty minds, dulled and overwhelmed with the weight of affaires, to be ignorant how to leave them, and not to know how to free themselves from them, nor how to leave and take them againe. . . . There is nothing so

goodly, so faire, and so lawfull, as to play the man well and duely: nor science so hard and difficult as to know how to live this life well. . . . There is a kinde of husbandry in knowing how to enjoy it. I enjoy it double to others." And he concludes the book by praising this our mortal life, "corporall voluptuousness" as well as that of the mind. . . .

To anyone coming to Montaigne for the first time I would recommend this last essay, *Of Experience*, to be read first. He reveals himself more there than anywhere, and it is the details of his life, his likes and dislikes, that attract us most of all in this "well-meaning booke."

It is time to turn back to volume one. The essays here are shorter—fifty-seven in number, as against thirteen in the third volume. They are as full of quaint conceits, quotations and anecdotes from the classics, but not quite so full of himself. "There is no man living," he says in an essay *Of Liars*, "whom it may lesse beseeme to speake of memorie, than my selfe, for to say truth, I have none at all." Ten chapters later on he muses on the imminence of death: "A man should ever, as much as in him lieth, be ready booted to take his journey, and above all things, looke he have then nothing to doe but with himselfe." Consequently he finds himself thinking of sudden death even in the transport of love: he writes things down at once lest he should die before he comes again to his writing-tables. "The deadest deaths are the best." . . . "I would have a man to be doing, and to prolong his lives offices as much as lieth in him, and let death seize upon me whilest I am setting my cabiges, carelesse of her dart, but more of my unperfect garden." There are few things that so constantly occupy Montaigne's mind more than death. "Life in itselfe is neither good nor evill: it is the place of good or evill, according as you prepare it for them. And if you have lived one day, you have seene all: one day is equal to all other daies. . . . The profit of life consists not in the space, but rather in the use. . . . I imagine truly how much an ever-during life would be lesse tolerable and more painfull to a man, than is the life which I have given him. . . . Neither to fly from life nor to run to death I have tempered both the one and other betweene sweetnes and sourenes."

Some of his wisest remarks are to be found in his essay, *Of Pedantisme*: "We should rather enquire who is better wise than who is more wise . . . even as birds flutter and skip from field to field to peeke up corne . . . and without tasting the same, carrie it in their bils, therewith to feed their little ones; so doe our pedants gleane and pick learning from bookes, and never lodge it farther than their lips . . . we take the opinions and knowledge of others into our protection. . . . I tell you they must be enfeoffed in us, and made our owne . . . what avails it to have our bellies full of meat, if it be not digested? . . . Except our mind be the better, unless our judgement be the sounder, I had rather my scholler had imployed his time in playing at tennis; I am sure his bodie would be the nimbler. See but one of these our universitie men returne from schole . . . who is so inapt for any matter? who so unfit for any companie? who so to seeke if he come into the world? all the advantage you discover in him is that his Latine and Greeke have made him more sottish, more stupid, and more presumptuous, than before he went from home. Whereas he should return with a mind full-fraught, he returnes with a wind-puft conceit; instead of plum-feeding the same, he has only spunged it up with varietie." Montaigne has very little use for such "flim-flam tales" as the succession of kings and "the first preter perfect tense of τύπτω": "I find Rome to have beene most valiant when it was least learned."

He acknowledges that he himself has "a smacke of everything in generall, but nothing to the purpose in particular." "The good that comes of studie is to prove better, wiser and honester . . . a mere bookish sufficiencie is unpleasant—among the liberall sciences, let us begin with that which makes us free . . . remove these thornie quiddities of logike, whereby our life can no whit be amended, and betake ourselves to the simple discourses of Philosophy . . . all sports and exercises shall be a part of study; running, wrestling, musicke, dancing, hunting, and managing of armes and horses . . . it is not a mind, it is not a body that we erect, but it is a man, and we must not make two parts of him." He hates severity of discipline in education, and would see "pictures of Gladness and Joy, of Flora and of the Graces to be set up round about the

school-house." He derides the waste of time spent on grammar and logic: "It is a naturall, simple, and unaffected speech that I love, so written as it is spoken, and such upon the paper, as it is in the mouth, a pithie, sinnowie, full, strong, compendious and materiall speech, not so delicate and affected as vehement and piercing. . . . I must needs acknowledge that the Greeke and Latine tongues are great ornaments in a gentleman, but they are purchased at over-high a rate," yet he himself has nothing but praise for Ovid, Virgil and the rest, and calls the Arthurian romances "wit-besotting trash."

His essay *Of Friendship* contains much that is self-revelatory: "I am nothing inquisitive whether a Lackey be chaste or no, but whether he be diligent . . . I feare not a hot swearing Cooke, as one that is ignorant and unskilfull . . . in bed I prefer beauty than goodnesse." He returns to the subject of moderation in this volume and, as we might expect, limits his discussion to moderation in the passion of love: "The love we beare to women is very lawful: yet doth Divinitie bridle and restraine the same." . . . "A man that is able may have wives, children, goods, and chiefly health, but not so tie himselfe unto them that his felicitie depend on them. We should reserve a store-house for our selves . . . altogether ours, and wholly free . . . the greatest thing of the world is for a man to know how to be his owne." In *A Consideration upon Cicero* he returns to himself: "I deadly hate to heare a flatterer . . . I ever write my letters in past-hast . . . I commonly begin without project: the first word begets the second . . . there is no accident woundeth men deeper, or goeth so neere the heart as the losse of children . . . there is nothing I hate more than driving of bargaines . . . to have more meanes of expences is ever to have increase of sorrow . . . in the third stage of my life I measure my garment according to my cloth, and let my expenses goe together with my comming in . . . I live from hand to mouth . . . a straight oare, being under water seemeth to be crooked. It is no matter to see a thing, but the matter is how a man doth see the same . . . it is the enjoying, and not the possessing that makes us happy. He that cannot stay till he be thirsty, can take no pleasure in drinking."

One of his most delicious confessions occurs in his essay *Of*

Smels and Odors : " As for me in particular, my mostachoes, which are verie thick, serve me for that purpose. Let me but approach my gloves or my hand-kercher to them, their smell will sticke upon them a whole day. They manifest the place I came from. The close-smacking, sweetnesse-moving, love-alluring, and greedie-smirking kisses of youth, were heretofore wont to sticke on them many houres after. . . . The principall care I take is to avoid and be far from all manner of filthy, foggy, ill-savouring and unwholesome aires." So much for the first volume.

We now come finally to the second, the longest, containing thirty-seven essays of varying length. He begins with a delightful essay on *Inconstancy*. "There is nothing I so hardly beleeve to be in man as constancie, and nothing so easy to be found in him as inconstancy"—and in woman he expects never to find faithfulness. Of himself he writes as I quoted before : " All contrarities are found in me, according to some turne or removing, and in some fashion or other."

In his second essay he denounces drunkenness : " Other vices but alter and distract the understanding, whereas this utterly subverteth the same, and astonieth the body . . . my taste, my rellish, and my complexion are sharper enemies unto this vice than my discourse, for besides that I captivate more easily my conceits under the auctoritie of ancient opinions, indeede I finde it to be a fond, a stupid, and a base kinde of vice, but lesse malicious and hurtfull than others ; all which shocke and with a sharper edge wound publike societie. And if we cannot give ourselves any pleasure except it cost us something ; I finde this vice to be lesse chargeable unto our conscience than others : besides it is not hard to be prepared, difficult to be found . . . sobrietie serveth to make us more jolly-quaint, lusty, and wanton for the exercise of love matters." He diverges from the point to talk about his father (a favourite topic with him), who at the age of sixty seldom ascended " any staires without skipping three or four steps at once." " But come we to our drinking againe . . . let none bestow the day in drinking, as the time that is due unto more serious negotiations, nor the nights wherein a man intendeth to get children."

In the essay, *To-morrow is a New Day* (most fascinating

of all his titles), he tells us: "Never was man lesse inquisitive, or pryed lesse into other mens affaires than I." In *Of Exercise or Practice* he returns to the subject of death. "Let me be under a roofe, in a good chamber, warme-clad, and well at ease, in some tempestuous and stormy night. I am exceedingly perplexed and much grieved for such as are abroad and have no shelter. But let me be in the storme myselfe I doe not so much as desire to be else-where. . . . I am in good hope the like will happen to me of death: and that it is not worth the labour I take for so many preparations as I prepare against her . . . for a man to acquaint himselfe with death, I finde no better way than to approach unto it."

Of the Affections of Fathers to their Children leads him to "utterly condemne all manner of violence in the education of a young spirit, brought up to honour and libertie . . . if it lay in my power to make my selfe feared, I had rather make my selfe beloved." But with regard to children generally "I wot not well, whether my selfe should not much rather desire to beget and produce a perfectly-well-shaped and excellently-qualified infant, by the acquaintance of the Muses than by the acquaintance of my wife. . . . There are few men given unto Poesie that would not esteeme it for a greater honour to be the father of Virgils Aeneidos than of the goodliest boy in Rome and that would not rather endure the losse of the one than the perishing of the other. . . . Nay, I make a great question whether Phidias would as highly esteeme and dearely love the preservation and successfull continuance of his naturall children, as he would an exquisite and matchlesse-wrought Image, that with long study and diligent care he had perfected according unto art."

In chapter ten, *Of Bookes*, he comes back yet again to his own writing: "Let that which I borrow be survaied, and then tell me whether I have made good choice of ornaments to beautifie and set forth the invention which ever comes from mee . . . I number not my borrowings, but weight them . . . my intention is to passe the remainder of my life quietly and not laboriously, in rest and not in care. There is nothing I will trouble or vex myself about, no not for science it selfe, what esteeme soever it be of . . . if I studie, I only endevour to find out the knowledge that

teacheth or handleth the knowledge of my selfe, and which may instruct me how to die well and how to live well. . . . I doe nothing without blithnesse . . . if one booke seeme tedious unto me I take another, which I follow not with any earnestnesse, except it be at such houres as I am idle, or that I am weary with doing nothing. I am not greatly affected to new books, because ancient Authors are, in my judgement, more full and pithy. . . . I esteeme Bocace his Decameron and Rabelais worth the paines-taking to reade them. . . . I speake my minde freely of all things." He goes on to indulge in panegyrics of the classics, specially his beloved "Plutarke," who is "everywhere free and open hearted . . . stuft with matters." . . . "I am wonderfull curious to discover and know the minde, the soul, the genuine disposition and naturall judgement of my authors." He objects to the "remisse niceness" of Cicero. "Concerning his eloquence," however, "it is beyond all comparison, and I verily beleeve that none shall ever equall it." "Historians are my right hand, for they are pleasant and easie . . . they ammuse and busie themselves more about counsels than events . . . they are fittest for me; and that's the reason why Plutarke above all in that kinde doth best please me." "The subject of an historie should be naked, bare and formelesse. . . . I have a while since accustomed my selfe to note at the end of my booke the time I made an end to read it, and to set downe what censure or judgement I gave of it."

Chapter eleven, *Of Crueltie*, contains this typical bit of common sense: "Amongst all other vices, there is none I hate more than Crueltie. . . . I cannot well endure a seelie dew bedabled hare to groane when she is seized upon by the houndes, although hunting be a violent pleasure . . . I seldom take any beast alive but I give him his libertie." But he well realises that "Nature hath of her own selfe added unto man a certaine instinct to inhumanitie."

He has a wonderful chapter on the habits of animals, and comes to this conclusion: "Touching trust and faithfulnesse, there is no creature in the world so trecherous as man . . . as for warre, which is the greatest and most glorious of all humane actions . . . it seemeth it hath not much to make itselfe to be wished for in beasts. . . . We have not much

more need of offices, of rules, and lawes how to live in our common-wealth than the cranes and ants have in theirs. Which notwithstanding, we see how orderly and without instruction they maintaine themselves." It is in this very long chapter that he dives most deeply into philosophy. "To a pensive and heart-grieved man a cleare day seemes gloomie and duskie. Our senses are not only altered, but many times dulled, by the passions of the mind. . . . Those which have compared our life unto a dreame, have happily had more reason so to doe than they were aware. When we dreame, our soule liveth, worketh and exerciseth all her faculties, even and as much as when it waketh . . . we wake sleeping, and sleep waking." In the chapter entitled *That our Desires are encreased by Difficultie* we read: "To forbid us anything is the ready way to make us long for it . . . that which so long held mariages in honour and safety in Rome was the liberty to break them who list. They kept their wives the better, forsomuch as they might leave them: and when divorces might freely be had, there past five hundred years and more before any would ever make use of them." In the essay *Of Presumption* we hear yet more of his idiosyncrasies: "As for musicke, were it either in voice, which I have most harsh, and very unapt, or in instruments, I could never be taught any part of it. As for dancing, playing at tennis, or wrestling, I could never attaine to any indifferent sufficiencie, but none at all in swimming, in fencing, in vaulting, or in leaping. My hands are so stiffe and nummie, that I can hardly write for my selfe, so that what I have once scribled, I had rather frame it a new than take the paines to correct it: and I reade but little better . . . I cannot very wel close up a letter, nor could I ever make a pen. I was never good carver at the table. I could never make ready nor arme a horse; nor handsomely array a hawke upon my fist, nor cast her off . . . nor could I ever speake to dogges, to birds, or to horses. The conditions of my body are, in fine, very well agreeing with those of my minde, wherein is nothing lively, but onely a compleate and constant vigour. . . . I am extreamlie lazie and idle, and exceedingly free, both my nature and art. I would as willingly lend my blood as my care." A noble and amazing confession. "In events, I carry myselfe man-like; in the conduct childishly. The

horror of a fall doth more hurt me than the blow. The play is not worth the candle . . . touching this new-found vertue of faining and dissimulation, which is now so much in credit, I hate it to the death . . . it is for free-men to speake truth. It is the chief and fundamentall part of Vertue. . . . I eschew commandement, duty, and compulsion. What I doe easily and naturally, if I resolve to doe it by expresse and prescribed appointment, I can then doe it no more. . . . I helpe myselfe to loose what I particularly locke up. . . . In games wherein wit may beare a part, as of chesse, of cards, of tables . . . I could never conceive but the common and plainest draughts. My apprehension is very sluggish and gloomy; but what it once holdeth, the same it keepeth fast. . . . There are divers of our French coines I know not: nor can I distinguish of one graine from another: nor do I scarcely know the difference between the cabige or lettice in my garden. I understand not the names of the most usuall tooles about husbandry . . . I was never skilfull in mechanicall arts . . . nor in the diversitie and nature of fruits, wines, or cakes . . . let me have all that may belong to a kitchin, yet shall I be ready to starve for hunger."

He picks out as his three "worthiest and most excellent men," Homer, Alexander the Great and Epaminondas. In one of his latest chapters he lashes the physicians in no uncertain tones: "The most ignorant and bungling horse-leech is fitter for a man that hath confidence in him than the skilfullest and learnedest physitian. The very choyce of most of their drugges is somewhat mysterious and divine." This attack is obviously induced by his own troublous complaint of stone-colic. "I am growne elder by seven or eight yeares since I beganne these essays; nor hath it beene without some new purchase. I have by the liberality of years acquainted my selfe with the stone-chollike." And he ends the book with a letter *To my Lady of Duras*: "My study and endevour to doe, and not to write. . . . I am a lesse maker of bookes then of anything else. Whosoever hath any worth in him, let him shew it in his behaviour, maners and ordinary discourses: be it to treat of love or of quarrels; of sport and play or bed-matters, at board or elsewhere . . . those whom I see make good bookes, having tattered hosen and ragged clothes on, had

they believed me they should first have gotten themselves good clothes."

This is perhaps a good note to part company with him on. There is really no limit to the number of quotations that one could cull to give a picture of this most lovable man. I have tried to do what he would have wanted me to do, describe him by letting him describe himself. For it is the man's own personality that we want to dig into when we read Montaigne's *Essays*, not the multitudinous anecdotes, not the splendid apophthegms which have become house-proverbs, not the philosophy. He is the most human man hold who ever wrote a book, and the highest praise we can give him is that which would also please him most. He succeeded in writing the most human book that has ever been written. And we love him not least of all for his very vices.

Listen to Sainte-Beuve's praise of him: "There is something for every age, for every hour of life: you cannot read in it for any time without having the mind filled and lined as it were, or, to put it better, fully armed and clothed."

II

NEKRASSOV (1821–1877)

NEKRASSOV was the poet of the proletariat, of suffering in general and of Russian woman's suffering in particular, but denouncing rather than sentimental, a realist from start to finish. He followed in the direct succession of Gogol as an apostle of a "To-the-People" movement.

For the first time in Russian poetry we read in his work of the life stories of cabmen, carters, gardeners, printers, sweating journalists, soldiers, hawkers, prostitutes, convicts and peasants, descriptions of street scenes, fires, funerals, tragic weddings, cruel dissipations, vulgarity, platitudes of town life, and so on.

He was as interested in the common life of the people as a newspaper reporter, as satiric in his outlook as Byron and Burns; with Dostoievsky his passion for Russia connoted unbearable suffering: he is pellucidly clear and writes down what he sees without moralising.

He was a member of an aristocratic family which had fallen on evil days at the time of his birth. His early education was in the hands of a devoted Polish mother. When later he developed a turn for satiric verse at school he was requested to leave and went to Petrograd at the age of fifteen. On threepence three farthings per day, which had to be shared with another young man and his boy-serf, he managed just to exist, but he nearly died of starvation. He sought for work of any kind and in the meanwhile learnt much of low life that was afterwards to prove of inestimable value to him. His wit and general brightness of manner brought him to the notice of the well-to-do and lazy, and among them too he found valuable copy. He then attempted to gain a living as a journalist and among his multitudinous duties managed to spare a little time for the pursuit of his own art. He became the editor of *The Contemporary*, and spent twenty years of hard, continuous

work in attempting to attract the best literary giants of his day to write for it.

In 1866 his first volume was published and met with instantaneous recognition, which deeply touched him, though he was always a severe critic of his own work.

> "Thou hast none of poetry's light freedom,
> My severe and clumsy, rustic verse."

After the publication of these, his best poems, his health gave way, and he spent much time on his brother's estate, where he got to know the peasantry intimately. Owing to his geniality, honesty and common sense the country people felt quite at home with him and did not mind recounting all their experiences to him. Consequently his peasant stories have a genuine ring about them that is unmistakable. He died in Petrograd in 1877, hard-worked to the end. He was a true representative of the best Russian Intelligentzia: not an extremist, but responsive (like Dostoievsky) at once to all suffering. His most famous poem, *Who Can be Happy and Free in Russia?* is the only one that I can attempt to deal with at any length here, but from it one may gauge the humanity and interest-rousing qualities of the poet.

It begins by the chance meeting of seven peasants on a country roadway. They immediately begin to argue over the question of who in Russia is happy and free.

> "Lukà cries, 'The Pope,'
> And Romàn, 'The Pomyèschick.'
> And Prov shouts, 'The Tsar,'
> And Demyàn, 'The official.'
> 'The round-bellied merchant,'
> Bawl both brothers Goòbin,
> Mitròdor and Ivan.
> Pakhòm shrieks, 'His Lordship,
> His most mighty Highness,
> The Tsar's chief adviser.'"

Unable to settle the question among themselves, they begin to fight. At last, with their ribs aching, they come to their senses, drink some water from a pool, wash in it

and lie down to rest. A little bird, thankful to one of them for having shown pity to her little one, gives them a fantastic tablecloth "that would bedeck itself with food and drink."

"'Go straight down the road,
Count the poles until thirty;
Then enter the forest
And walk for a verst.
By then you'll have come
To a smooth little lawn
With two pine-trees upon it.
Beneath these two pine-trees
Lies buried a casket
Which you must discover.
The casket is magic,
And in it there lies
An enchanted white napkin.
Whenever you wish it
This napkin will serve you
With food and with vodka:
You need but say softly,
"O napkin enchanted,
Give food to the peasants."
But one thing remember:
Food, summon at pleasure
As much as you fancy,
But vodka, no more
Than a bucket a day.
If once, even twice
You neglect my injunction
Your wish shall be granted;
The third time, take warning:
Misfortune will follow.'"

They first meet the pope, or village priest, and ask him whether he is not the happiest man in Russia, to which he replies:

"'Of whom do you make
Little scandalous stories?
Of whom do you sing
Rhymes and songs most indecent?

The pope's honoured wife,
And his innocent daughters,
Come, how do you treat them ?
At whom do you shout
Ho, ho, ho in derision
When once you are past him ? '
The peasants cast downwards
Their eyes and keep silent. . . ."

There follows a description of scenery, a charming lyric which I cannot forbear from quoting :

" The cloudlets in springtime
Play round the great sun
Like small grandchildren frisking
Around a hale grandsire,
And now, on his right side
A bright little cloud
Has grown suddenly dismal,
Begins to shed tears.
The grey thread is hanging
In rows to the earth,
While the red sun is laughing
And beaming upon it
Through torn fleecy clouds,
Like a merry young girl
Peeping out from the corn."

The priest goes on to sketch the sort of life he is condemned to lead and concludes on this note :

" ' At times you are sent for
To pray by the dying,
But Death is not really
The awful thing present,
But rather the living,—
The family losing
Their only support.
You pray by the dead,
Words of comfort you utter,
To calm the bereavèd ones ;
And then the old mother
Comes tottering towards you,

And stretching her bony
And toil-blistered hand out ;
You feel your heart sicken,
For there in the palm
Lie the precious brass farthings.
Of course it is only
The price of your praying.
You take it, because
It is what you must live on ;
Your words of condolence
Are frozen, and blindly,
Like one deeply insulted,
You make your way homeward.' "

In chapter two we are taken to the village fair.

" The spring sun is playing
On heads hot and drunken,
On boisterous revels,
On bright mixing colours ;
The men wear wide breeches
Of corduroy velvet,
With gaudy striped waistcoats
And shirts of all colours ;
The women wear scarlet ;
The girls' plaited tresses
Are decked with bright ribbons ;
They glide about proudly,
Like swans on the water."

In chapter three, " The Drunken Night," occurs the exquisite metaphor :

" The moon is in Heaven,
And God is commencing
To write His great letter
Of gold on blue velvet. . . .
Then suddenly singing
Is heard in a chorus
Harmonious and bold,
A row of young fellows,
Half drunk, but not falling,

Come staggering onwards,
All lustily singing :
They sing of the Volga,
The daring of youths
And the beauty of maidens . . .
A hush falls all over
The road, and it listens :
And only the singing
Is heard, sweet and tuneful,
Like wind-ruffled corn."

They then accost the pomyèschick (the landowner) and inquire of him whether he is not the happiest of all the Russians, to which he answers :

" ' The joy and the beauty,
The pride of all Russia—
The Lord's holy churches—
Which brighten the hill-sides
And gleam like great jewels
On the slopes of the valleys,
Were rivalled by one thing
In glory, and that
Was the nobleman's manor.
Adjoining the manor
Were glass-houses sparkling,
And bright Chinese arbours,
While parks spread around it.
On each of the buildings
Gay banners displaying
Their radiant colours,
And beckoning softly,
Invited the guest
To partake of the pleasures
Of rich hospitality.
Never did Frenchmen
In dreams even picture
Such sumptuous revels
As we used to hold.
Not only for one day,
Or two, did they last—
But for two months together !

We fattened great turkeys,
We brewed our own liquors,
We kept our own actors,
And troupes of musicians,
And legions of servants!
Why, I kept five cooks,
Besides pastry-cooks, working,
Two blacksmiths, three carpenters,
Eighteen musicians,
And twenty-one-huntsmen . . .
My God . . .'
The afflicted
Pomyèschick broke down here,
And hastened to bury
His face in the cushion. . . .
(And now—) 'What has happened?
When in the air
You can smell a rank graveyard,
You know you are passing
A nobleman's manor!
The axe of the robber
Resounds in the forest,
It maddens your heart,
But you cannot prevent it.' "

Part II. deals charmingly with the story of the last pomyèschick:

"A very old man
Wearing long white moustaches
(He seems to be all white);
His cap, broad and high-crowned,
Is white, with a peak,
In the front, of red satin.
His body is lean
As a hare's in the winter,
His nose like a hawk's beak.
His eyes—well, they differ:
The one, sharp and shining,
The other—the left eye—
Is sightless and blank,
Like a dull leaden farthing.

Some woolly white poodles
With tufts on their ankles
Are in the boat too."

This venerable barin Prince Yutiàtin believes that the old regime still exists and his serfs have agreed to humour him in order to keep him alive.

They agree to

"'Keep silent and act still
As if all this trouble
Had never existed:
Give way to him, bow to him
Just as in old days.'"

So the Prince has all his whims satisfied and peasants are beaten (voluntarily) at his pleasure. He orders his sons to dance and girls to sing.

"The golden-haired lady
Does not want to sing,
But the old man will have it.
The lady is singing
A song low and tender,
It sounds like the breeze
On a soft summer evening
In velvety grasses
Astray, like spring raindrops
That kiss the young leaves,
And it soothes the Pomyèschick,
The feeble old man:
He is falling asleep now . . .
And gently they carry him
Down to the water,
And into the boat.
And he lies there, still sleeping.
Above him stands, holding
A big green umbrella,
The faithful old servant,
His other hand guarding

The sleeping Pomyèschick
From gnats and mosquitoes.
The oarsmen are silent,
The faint-sounding music
Can hardly be heard
As the boat moving gently
Glides on through the water. . . ."

In Part III., having failed to elicit a satisfactory answer to their question from the men, they decide to try the women. They go to the woman Matròna

(Who) " Is tall, finely moulded,
Majestic in bearing,
And strikingly handsome.
Of thirty-eight years
She appears, and her black hair
Is mingled with grey.
Her complexion is swarthy,
Her eyes large and dark
And severe, with rich lashes."

They manage to prevail upon her to tell her life story :

" ' My girl-hood was happy,
For we were a thrifty
And diligent household :
And I, the young maiden,
With father and mother
Knew nothing but joy.
My father got up
And went out before sunrise,
He woke me with kisses
And tender caresses :
My brother, while dressing,
Would sing little verses :
" Get up, little sister,
Get up, little sister,
In no little beds now
Are people delaying,
In all little churches
The peasants are praying ;

Get up, now, get up,
It is time, little sister.
The shepherd has gone
To the field with the sheep,
And no little maidens
Are lying asleep,
They've gone to pick raspberries,
Merrily singing. . . ."

I never ran after
The youths, and the forward
I checked very sharply.
To those who were gentle
And shy, I would whisper:
"My cheeks will grow hot,
And sharp eyes has my mother:
Be wise, now, and leave me
Alone" . . . and they left me.'"

At last came the man to whom she was destined to give her heart:

"'And Philip was handsome,
Was rosy and lusty,
Was strong and broad-shouldered,
With fair curling hair,
With a voice low and tender. . . .
Ah, well . . . I was won. . . .
. . . . . .
"Don't fear, little pigeon,
We shall not regret it,"
Said Philip, but still
I was timid and doubtful.
Of course I was fairer
And sweeter and dearer
Than any that lived,
And his arms were about me. . . .
Then all of a sudden
I made a sharp effort
To wrench myself free.
"How now? What's the matter?
You're strong, little pigeon!"

Said Philip, astonished,
But still held me tight.
" Ah, Philip, if you had
Not held me so firmly
You would not have won me:
I did it to try you,
To measure your strength:
You were strong and it pleased me."
We must have been happy
In those fleeting moments
When softly we whispered
And argued together:
I think that we never
Were happy again. . . .' "

She marries Philip and joins his family.

" ' A quarrelsome household
It was—that of Philip's
To which I belonged now:
And I from my girlhood
Stepped straight into Hell.
My husband departed
To work in the city,
And leaving, advised me
To work and be silent,
To yield and be patient:
" Don't splash the red iron
With cold water—it hisses."
With father and mother
And sisters-in-law he
Now left me alone:
Not a soul was among them
To love or to shield me,
But many to scold. . . .
Well, you know yourselves, friends,
How quarrels arise
In the homes of the peasants.
A young married sister
Of Philip's one day
Came to visit her parents.
She found she had holes

In her boots, and it vexed her.
Then Philip said, " Wife,
Fetch some boots for my sister."
And I did not answer
At once : I was lifting
A large wooden tub,
So, of course, couldn't speak.
But Philip was angry
With me, and he waited
Until I had hoisted
The tub to the oven
Then struck me a blow
With his fist, on my temple. . . .
Again Philip struck me . . .
And again Philip struck me . . .
Well, that is the story.
'Tis surely not fitting
For wives to sit counting
The blows of their husbands,
But then I had promised
To keep nothing back.' "

A baby is born to her, and her life becomes more and more of a burden to her : one friend alone of Philip's relatives, an old man called Savyèli, has pity on her. Savyèli has been branded as a convict for burying a German alive. She relates now the story of his life and more particularly the account of his crime :

" ' " He (the German) started to nag us,
Quite coolly and slowly,
Without heat or hurry ;
For that was his way.
And we, tired and hungry,
Stood listening in silence.
He kicked the wet earth
With his boot while he scolded,
Not far from the edge
Of the pit. I stood near him,
And happened to give him
A push with my shoulder :
Then somehow a second

And third pushed him gently. . . .
We spoke not a word,
Gave no sign to each other,
But silently, slowly,
Drew closer together,
And edging the German
Respectfully forward,
We brought him at last
To the brink of the hollow . . .
He tumbled in headlong !
' A ladder,' he bellows :
Nine shovels reply.
' Heave-to '—the words fell
From my lips on the instant,
The word to which people
Work gaily in Russia :
' Heave-to,' and ' Heave-to,'
And we laboured so bravely
That soon not a trace
Of the pit was remaining,
The earth was as smooth
As before we had touched it :
And then we stopped short
And we looked at each other. " ' "

Matròna gets Savyèli to look after her infant Djòma, and while she is away the pigs attacked and killed him. The country police as the custom is in Russia threatened to hold an inquest unless they were bribed : this Matròna could not afford.

" ' " My God, give me patience,
And let me not strangle
The wicked blasphemer ! "
I looked at the doctor
And shuddered in terror ;
Before him lay lancets,
Sharp scissors and knives.
I conquered myself,
For I knew why they lay there.
I answered him trembling,
" I loved little Djòma,

I would not have harmed him."
" And did you not poison him,
Give him some powder ? " " "

They refuse to listen to her piteous cries:

" ' They have lifted the napkin
Which covered my baby:
His little white body
With scissors and lancets
They worry and torture . . .
The room has grown darker,
I'm struggling and screaming,
You butchers ! You fiends !
Oh, hear me, just God !
May thy curse fall and strike them !
Ordain that their garments
May rot on their bodies !
Their eyes be struck blind,
And their brains scorch in madness !
Their wives be unfaithful,
Their children be crippled ! . . .
The pope lit his pipe
And sat watching the doctor.
He said, ' You are rending
A heart with a knife.'
I started up wildly :
I knew that the doctor
Was piercing the heart
Of my little dead baby."

Her husband is taken for the army, and Matrona goes, although her time is on her to bring to birth another baby, to plead for him to the Governor's lady. Somewhat to our surprise she wins her cause and gets her husband back again, but the peasants are cured after hearing her story of imagining that any woman could be happy in Russia.

" ' The Tsar, little Father,
But never a woman:
God knows, among women
Your search will be endless.' "

So they continue their wanderings, and having heard many grim stories of all sorts, they remain without a

solution to their problem, and the only consolation suggested by the author comes in a subtle touch : a son of a psalm-singer, with a knowledge of, and deep sympathy for, all the down-trodden ones, finds exaltation in putting together songs about their pains and greatness :

" In his breast rose throbbingly powers unembraceable,
In his ears rang melody—henceforth undefaceable :
Words of azure radiance, noble in benignity.
Hailing coming happiness and the People's dignity."

Happiness, Nekrassov concludes, can only be won in doing creative work.

I have, I think, by my copious quotations from his most popular poem at any rate proved his claim to be considered " the Russian Crabbe," the uncompromising realist who can depict the sorrows of the poor with undeflected trueness of aim.

III

PUSHKIN (1799–1837)

IT is habitual with critics, especially critics of Russian literature, to probe with a microscopic accuracy into the work of the subject they undertake to explain: they search for psychological phenomena untiringly, and are not content unless they can wrest a secret from the author which the author himself would certainly in many cases never have realised that he possessed. We see this in our own tongue in many of the critical essays on Shakespeare. We see it applied to Pushkin equally unnecessarily; for Pushkin needs no interpreter: he is delightfully human, clear, sincere, impulsive, vital and vivifying, as far removed as possible from any artfulness, the least of a digger in the depths of his own soul imaginable. He is the type of artist who sees Beauty in her naked blaze and straightway reincarnates her because he cannot help it. He is of the earth, earthy in the best sense of the word. The final word about him is that he accepted life open-heartedly and as a consequence requires in his readers an equal open-heartedness and nothing else.

He was brought up as a boy in an atmosphere of that sparkling elegance which we associate with the French, and himself wrote verses in that tongue, by the age of twelve acquiring a real taste in French literature. He revelled in Plutarch, Voltaire, Rousseau and Molière, imitated the French comedies and acted them before his sister. As was customary in Russia, he was, as a boy, allowed free access to the society of the literary and artistic people who frequented his father's house. Here he entered into that life of boundless hospitality, disorderliness, whimsical jollity, and revelry, of erotic and bacchanalian orgies, which were typical of the upper classes of his time.

From his nurse, a life-long friend, he learnt to love the world of Russian folklore.

For five years, from twelve to seventeen, he was at the Lyceum, just then opened at the Tsàrskoye Selò, which

reflected among its youthful pupils the same passions of illicit amours, drink, and literature which characterised the parents. They became a sort of jovial anarchists. Like the Elizabethans, they were as often intoxicated with poetry as with wine. Pushkin early became the leader, as was only natural: he was already the best-read man in Russia; he was enthusiastic over the work of his younger contemporaries; he was an ideal companion. Like Milton and most other geniuses of a high order, he recognised his *métier* very early in his life. He wrote in his teens:

"I am a poet too. My new and modest road
Is now bestrewn with flowers by goddesses of singing,
And gods have poured into my breast
The flames, elating visions bringing. . . ."

Not only so, but—

"My pen revels in finding
In it the ends of lines.
Exactness of expressions
Through hallowed crystal shines."

Exactness of expression is as important to Pushkin as it was to Pope, just as fearless honesty was the keystone of his personality.

It was at the public examination of the Lyceists in Russian literature in 1815 that he first came before the public eye. Together with other competitors he had to read his work before the old ode-writer D'erjàvin, who was so thrilled by *The Reminiscences of the Tsàrskoye Selò* that he wanted to rush forward and embrace the young poet.

Jukòvski, then at the height of his fame, would read his verses to Pushkin and rely on his judgment. When in return Pushkin read *Ruslàn and Ludmìla*, Jukòvski gave the boy his portrait with this inscription: "To the victorious pupil from his conquered teacher."

Such treatment might well be expected to turn the head of the youth, but Pushkin was then, as ever, modest and extremely critical of his own work. He was, as I have said, always searching for hidden genius in others: he it was

who first discovered Gogol, and when that Dickens of Russia published *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector-General*, the subjects in each case being suggested to him by Pushkin, the poet said delightedly: "The rascal robs me in such a bewitching way that it is impossible to be angry with him."

Pushkin's father declined to allow him to take a commission in the Hussars, and at eighteen the poet obtained a post in the Foreign Office, where he had much leisure, and plunged deeper than ever into the excesses common to his time, with the result that, though he swam, rode, fenced and walked to keep himself fit, twice in his nineteenth and twentieth years he nearly lost his health. Nor did his riotous living prevent him from working hard at his poetry.

In 1820 the long fairy tale *Ruslàn and Ludmìla* appeared. The nearest approach to it in England is *Hero and Leander*—sensuous yet cold. Everywhere it was read, copied out and learnt by heart by tradesman and noble alike. The story was founded on the national folklore. A wicked, humped dwarf carries away the only daughter of Prince Vladimir of Kiev from her nuptial bed to his castle: Ruslàn, the bridegroom, and three disappointed lovers give chase. The adventures of the four warriors, Ludmìla's seclusion in the wizard's castle and Ruslàn's ultimate victory by hanging on to the long beard of the dwarf as he flies over seas and forests form the plot of the story.

The method of handling the story was fascinating, and quite new to Russia. It was vigorous, whimsical, absolutely natural and human: it was this last characteristic in particular which captivated the hearts of the whole race. Russia always loves the natural—but she did not yet recognise why it was that Pushkin especially appealed to her: there had been hitherto no realistic school.

No one realised, Pushkin least of all, that *Ruslàn and Ludmìla* laid the foundation-stone of all future Russian literature.

The two schools then in existence, the pseudo-classical and the romantic, debated savagely as to which category Pushkin belonged. They were unable to grasp the significance of this bubbling over of human fun, this directness of detail; indignation at such ideas as "Ruslàn's tickling

with his spear the nostrils of the giant's head," as bringing the national element into poetry at all, and so on, spread fast.

In the same year Pushkin threw himself heart and soul into the movement of young reformers, and joined the "Society of Welfare," which somewhat naturally roused the Government to action.

Alexander I. was for banishing him; Karamzin, however, pleaded for him with such effect that he was only sent to Bessarabia for a year. His banishment only accentuated his popularity. He took advantage of his retirement to write *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* in eight hundred lines, the main feature of which is the first appearance in his work of *that grand reverence for women* which is one of Pushkin's greatest charms.

A man in a Circassian village brings home one day as prisoner a young Russian, who has left his usual world to find freedom in the wilderness: being captured, he is put in irons and left to drag out his days in a cave. A young Circassian girl falls in love with him; he responds out of pity, being in love with another girl at home who did not, however, return his affection. The girl, struck with grief, yet understands, and gives up visiting him secretly, and while the tribe are away raiding she comes with a saw and dagger and gives him his freedom. They part with a kiss of great *human* love. The young man, touched to the heart, looks back after he has swum the river, but the girl is nowhere to be seen and "only a circle widens on the face of the water, in the gentle shine of the moon." . . . The public swallowed the poem greedily, the description of the manners of the Circassians especially attracting them. In another poem Pushkin uses a legend which he came across while visiting the ancient capital of the Crimean Tartars.

The young Tartar Khan, Givèy, captures in a raid on Poland a young Christian princess, Mary, and conceals her in his harem. Her purity and saintly beauty so work upon him that he remains in awe before her. Another beauty, Zarèma, once a favourite of Givèy, implores Mary to make her man come back to her: failing, of course, Zarèma kills her and is herself drowned. The Khan in despair leaves his harem and goes out to wage wars, and returns in the end to

build a fountain in memory of Mary, over which he erects a crescent crowned with a cross.

It was at this time that Pushkin fell under the influence of Byron and learned English to do so: not that he imitated Byron, but he was braced up to do something equally good in another way. This was in Kishinòv, a hot-bed of noisy, passionate freethinking blended with Asiatic aboriginality. He fought three duels, one of them resulting from a quarrel at a ball as to whether a waltz or a mazurka should be next on the programme. He then fell in love with a gipsy and joined the camp to which the girl belonged. The result was another poem called *The Gipsies.*

The hero, a man of society, comes to join the free life of a gipsy tribe because he despises the degenerating effect of civilisation. He has had enough of people in cities.

> "Of love afraid, they cast off feeling
> And thought, and barter their free will:
> Before their idols blindly kneeling
> They ask for chains and money still."

The gipsies admit him into their careless, free, happy life. Alèko, as they call him, falls in love with the only child of a very wise old man and is happy, just loving, lying about in the sun and taking round for show a tame bear.

Zemphìra, the girl, after bearing a son to Alèko, gets tired of him and falls in love with another gipsy. Alèko feels this very much and complains to her father, who tells him that he too in his youth lost his love in a similar way.

"'And thou didst not kill her lover?'" asks her lover. The old gipsy replies:

> "'For what? Man's youth enjoys bird's licence.
> Who is there that can love restrain?
> In turn, joy brings to all sufficance.
> What has been once comes ne'er again.'"

This does not satisfy Alèko, who kills Zemphìra and her lover, after which the old father implores him to leave their free, kind world and return to civilisation.

Pushkin next writes a *Mazeppa* of his own, the epic of

Peter the Great, but not idealised as Byron's was. . . . The heroine Marya leaves her lover and becomes insane when her father is executed.

This stern, objective fragment of an epic, falling into their sentimental world of keepsakes, ribbons, roses, and cupids, was like a bas-relief conceived by a Titan and executed by a god . . . it is not surprising that it met with little or no appreciation. It is as if Tennyson had followed up his early poems in a style as concise as Pope's and as concentrated as Browning's dramatic lyrics. It revealed an entirely new phase in his style: hitherto it had seemed as shining and luscious fruit, now it became a concentrated, weighty tramp of ringing rhyme.

Pushkin has been accused (not by the Russians) of sentimentality . . . a charge that can be confuted by quoting almost any of his lines at random.

Does this, for instance, reek of sentimentality?—

> "To see you every hour that flies,
> To follow where your footsteps wander—
> Your lip's faint smile, your turn of eyes,
> On these my thirsting love to squander,
> To listen to your voice, to grasp
> By man's soul woman's consummation,
> To pine for you, wither and gasp,
> This is a life's supreme elation."

Or this?—

> "Just what I was before, the same I am to-day,
> Light-hearted, ever prone to fall in love again."

Or this Tenth Commandment?—

> "In thy commandment, Lord, I read
> My neighbours' goods I must not covet,
> But ask me not to rise above it
> When tender hopes for licence plead:
> I do not wish to harm my fellow,
> I never grudge him house or folk:
> Nor will his cattle e'er provoke
> My envy—though in hordes they bellow:

His wife or ox I never seek,
Of asses I am unobservant:
But if his youthfullest maid-servant
Is pretty! Lord, there I am weak."

He was not given to brooding over disappointment, nor was there any self-centredness about him. Only once, on his twenty-eighth birthday, does he show himself obsessed with the problems of existence:

"Casual present, gift so aimless,
Life, why art thou given to me?
As by secret judgment nameless,
Why is death-doom passed on thee?

Who with hostile power inspired
Called me out of nothingness,
My poor heart with passion fired,
Doubt upon my mind did press?

Aimless is my whole existence,
Vague my mind, emotions thin.
With monotonous persistence
Life out-tires me with its din."

He was, *par excellence*, the singer of *this* world, reflecting it with a photographic exactness. Gogol called it *reality turned into a pearl of creation*, which is about the best and most concise definition we could require.

As a result of this Byronic obsession Pushkin was sent to Odessa to join the staff of the Governor. But the atmosphere of rectitude and cold officialdom bored him: trying his best was no good here: he was sent into the depths of the country to do easy and interesting reconnaissance work, to investigate the causes and results of the locust plague. The following is his official report:—

"The locust was flitting and flitting:
And sitting
And sitting sat, ravage committing,
At last the place quitting."

About this time he wrote to a friend a letter which was intercepted. It ran as follows :—

"I am reading the Bible. The Holy Ghost sometimes soothes me, but I prefer Goethe and Shakespeare. There is an Englishman here, a clever atheist, who overturns the theory of immortality—I am having lessons from him. . . ."

The reading public got to know of it and devoured it . . . officially it led to his banishment to the estate of his parents. His father bullied him so that he begged to be sent to a fortress. Jukòvski intervened and his parents left him to the care of his nurse, and he had two years of quiet, learning more and more of the old folklore. He wrote six long fairy tales of the school of *Ruslàn and Ludmìla*. He wrote the long historical poem *Poltàva*, the novel in verse, *Evgèni Onyègin*, the historical drama in blank verse, *Borìs Godunòv*, the story in verse, *The Bronze Horsemen*, and dozens of shorter poems. He abandoned Byron for Shakespeare.

"Shakespeare," he wrote about this time—"what a man! I am overwhelmed. What a nonentity Byron is with his travesty of tragedy, as compared to Shakespeare." We can trace this influence in *Borìs Godunòv*.

Shakespeare helped him to develop his power of realism: even his wonderland becomes a matter of course—Russia.

Evgèni Onyègin swept the country off its feet. Society suddenly saw the greatness of the simple beauty of Russia, the dignified, lovable Russian woman: in the hero he reflects his own education, tastes and manners: it is the first work of a consciously psychological analysis in Russian literature.

The typical man of society is bored with life because he does not know what real life is: he "hastened to live and hurried to feel" on too narrow a scale. His first blow is the realisation of the fact that the thoughtful girl of seventeen, whose love he neglected early in life, rejects his passion when she, married, is shining and dignified in society life. Then only, being honestly told by her that she still loves him, but is going to remain true to her husband, he flies from the capital, tortured by his first deep heart pain. Here the story ends. At the beginning he kills a romantic poet, Lensky, in a duel, a man of whom

he is genuinely fond, but to whose *fiancée*, Olga, who is simple, fresh, blue-eyed, with a round face like the foolish moon, he pays court out of sheer devilry. The elder sister, Tatiana, shy and dreamy, and yet clean-cut in character and iron-willed, is the girl who has given her heart to Onyégin and afterwards rejects him. She is as real as Diana Middleton or Sophia Western, as sensible as Portia, as resolute as Juliet. She is the type of all that is best in the Russian woman, taken straight from life, the crowning glory of Russian life. Mr Baring puts her confession of love on a level with Romeo and Juliet's leave-taking as one of the absolutely perfect things in the literature of the world. It is, he says, a piece of poetry as pure as a crystal, as spontaneous as a blackbird's song. It is Pushkin's most characteristic work. It is certainly the best-known and most popular. It is all—like *Hamlet*—quotations! Pushkin himself speaks as having seen the unfettered march of the novel in a magic prism. The scenes are clear, the nail is hit on the head every time, all the labour escapes notice. It arrests the attention as a story, it is amusing; it delights the intelligence. It is simply a story of everyday life executed perfectly by a master spirit.

"'Onyegin, I was younger then, and better-looking, I suppose; and I loved you. . . .

For me, Onyegin, all that wealth,
That showy tinsel of Court life,
All my successes in the world,
My well-appointed house and balls . . .
For me, are nought!—I gladly would
Give up these rags, this masquerade,
And all this brilliancy and din,
For a few books, a garden wild,
Our weather-beaten house, so poor—
Those very places where I met
With you, Onyegin, that first time;
And for the churchyard of our village,
Where now a cross and shady trees
Stand on the grave of my poor nurse.

. . . . . .

And happiness was possible then!
It was so near!'"

The girl beseeches him to leave her.

"'I love you'" (she goes on):
"'Why should I hide the truth from you?
But I am given to another,
And true to him I shall remain.'"

Pushkin's own opinion of the work is shown in the dedication:

"Accept these motley chapters' run,
Pages half mirth, half sadness blending,
Idealistic, unpretending:
The casual fruit of leisure, fun,
Insomnia, light inspirations
In youthful and unripened years
My mind's dispassioned observations,
My heart's grave notes on human cares."

In form the novel is like *Childe Harold*. But the descriptions, the irony, and humour are truly Russian.

As an example of all three in one these may suffice:

"For forty years he nagged with his housekeeper, looked out of the window and squashed flies."

"Once upon a time the head of a secret team of gamblers, now he was a kind and simple father of a bachelor's numerous brood, living the life of a true philosopher: planting cabbages, breeding ducks and geese and teaching his youngsters the A B C."

All the characters use genuine everyday speech, and yet the realistic subjects are magically turned into poetry. "One can be a serious man and yet think of the beauty of one's nails."

An example of his descriptive power may be found in this stanza on Moscow:

"O'er the snow-humps the sleigh is dashing,
Alongside in the streets are flashing
Shops, convents, palaces, mean shacks,
Peasantry, country-wives, cozàcks,
Gardens of kitchen-stuff and flowers,
Street-boys, lamps, chemists, fashion-stores,

Churches, stone lions at house doors,
Sentries, sleighs, balconies, old towers,
Merchants, Tartars that sell old clo'
And on the crosses many a crow."

As you can see even from these few extracts, the realism in *Onyégin* is the realism of Jane Austen—meticulous, correct, amazingly sketched in.

He imitated the Koran, blending sensuality with religious enthusiasm and even the element of nonsense in a way that is inimitably reminiscent of the Eastern Law.

Equally brilliant are his *Imitations of Dante* . . . the Divine Comedy lives again for us in Pushkin's rendering : again, in *The Journeying of Cæsar*, we seem to be reading the Latin classics themselves. But his prose-work as a whole is perhaps below his poetry, though Baring does not think so. Unfortunately in England it is on these very prose works that we have for the most part to rely, because so few of his poems are translated.

He was not born with a passion to reform the world : he was neither Liberal nor Conservative : he was a democrat in his love for the Russian people, a patriot in his love of his country.

There seem to have been in him, however, two distinct spirits, as in so many other Russians—the inspired priest of Apollo and the most frivolous of all the frivolous children of the world. The former characteristic predominated, but the people, his readers, preferred his latter mood ; they like the dazzling colours, the sensuousness of his early poems—they could not appreciate the nobler, simpler and more majestic harmonies of *Borìs Godunòv* and *Onyègin*.

It is this two-sidedness that makes for his all-embracing humanity — Dostoievsky called him *πανανδρωπος* — this capacity for understanding everybody which makes him so profoundly Russian. He set free the Russian language from the bondage of the conventional and, like Peter the Great, spent his whole life in apprenticeship and all his energies in craftsmanship. He is completely the artist and never the fighter, which explains the coldness of much of his work.

He was no innovator of forms in his verse: he was content to follow the accepted types; nor did he ever fly too high . . . he does not try to unlock the gates of the Unknown: the old iambic introduced by Lomonòsov was good enough for him. Only in *Borìs Godunòv* does he break out into an imitation of Shakespearean form: the play is rather like *Henry VIII.* in its plan: it is a succession of isolated scenes, not a coherent drama; there is no definite beginning or end.

On the other hand his scenes, taken by themselves, tragic or comic, are as vivid as any in Shakespeare; the characters all live and are convincing.

As a chronicle it is completely successful. There are scenes so inspired as to be really in spirit Shakespearean, an absence of all conscious effort and visible artifice which only the greatest artists can attain to.

As there are no innovations, so are there no mannerisms: metaphors and similes are few and apt. Of Peter the Great we read:

> " . . . His eyes
> Are shining: features awe-inspiring:
> His movements swift: handsome, untiring,
> He is like Heaven's thunderstorm."

Wholesome, breezy, clear-cut, genuine, free and honest —those are the adjectives to apply to his art. Unfortunately it is impossible to convey in English the ring and beauty of his original work.

While he was at home the Decembrists' revolt took place, 14th December 1824. He was absent from all his old friends and was naturally concerned about them. He petitioned the Government, signing a pledge never to join any secret society, to give him his liberty. One morning a field-yeger appeared, gave him time to put on his great-coat and take his money, enter the sledge and dash to Petrograd. After travelling two hundred miles he was brought before the young Emperor and the following conversation took place:—

"Pushkin, I hope thou art pleased with thy return. Wouldst thou take part in the 14th December if thou wert here?"

"By all means, Sovereign. All my friends were in it. My absence alone has saved me."

"Well, thou hast played the fool sufficiently long. I hope thou wilt be sensible in the future, and we shall not quarrel. Send me all thy manuscripts. I shall be thy censor myself."

He was received everywhere with open arms. He joined the main current of social and literary life and speedily electrified society. He was for a little entirely happy, but he had overestimated the extent of his freedom. Gradually he realised that he was not allowed even to read aloud his writings without submitting them to his censor.

Boris Godunòv was refused on the plea that it would have been better if the author had rewritten it in prose, turning it into a historical novel like those of Sir Walter Scott. Consequently the drama did not appear till 1831, much polished and toned down.

In these last years Pushkin founded and edited a literary monthly called *The Contemporary*, which played a great part in the development of the literature of Russia later on.

The net of officialdom was meanwhile being drawn tighter and tighter round him: he had to attend compulsory meaningless ceremonies at the Court. The Government gave him 20,000 roubles for the publication of his works, and elected him member of the Academy. But they would not allow him to retire from the service. In 1829 he dashed away to the Caucasus without leave.

He joined the ranks and fought, but returned safely. He then married a society beauty whom he loved sincerely but who increased his expenses enormously. He continued to train his talents and wrote a series of brilliant epigrams which increased the number of his friends and foes. He had enemies in every camp. . . . Meanwhile a young officer, of French and Dutch extraction, by name Baron Dantes, began to press his attentions on Pushkin's wife. Pushkin received a series of anonymous letters . . . he, however, trusted his wife completely. She urged him to retire with her to the country to get away from the impending doom, but he challenged the Baron, who had by that time married the sister of Pushkin's wife. Pushkin was fatally wounded in the duel and died mourned by a

whole nation. . . . And what is his legacy? He must have been no mean poet who could induce Turgenev to say that he would burn all his works if he could but have written four lines of the conversation between the Bookseller and the Poet.

His legacy is that he stripped Reality from her daintily-coloured veil—not to show her possible hideousness, but to enjoy the beauty of her form. And beneath his hands nakedness rose like a piece of magic sculpture, warm and breathing of life. His variety and the width of his range are astonishing.

I have attempted to convey something of this. He can write an elegy as tender as Tennyson, a picture of a snow-storm in intoxicating rhythms which would have made Poe green with jealousy; his patriotic poems are lofty and inspired, his prayers humble, sincere and devout. His love poems are as playful as Heine's, as tender as Musset's; he can translate with equal spirit and exactness Byron and Horace, the Koran and Dante. Mr Baring selects two poems as examples of the greatness of his style and the force of his magic.

> "As bitter as stale aftermath of wine
> Is the remembrance of delirious days:
> But as wine waxes with the years, so weighs
> The past more sorely, as my days decline.
> My path is dark. The future lies in wait,
> A gathering ocean of anxiety.
> But oh! my friends! to suffer, to create,
> That is my prayer: to live and not to die!
> I know that ecstasy shall still lie there
> In sorrow and adversity and care.
> Once more I shall be drunk on strains divine,
> Be moved to tears by musings that are mine:
> And haply when the last sad hour draws nigh
> Love with a farewell smile shall light the sky."

The other and greater is *The Prophet*, which is Miltonic in conception and Dantesque in expression: it is, Mr Baring says, the Pillars of Hercules of the Russian language.

"My spirit was weary, and I was athirst, and I was

astray in the dark wilderness. And the Seraphim with six wings appeared to me at the crossing of the ways: and he touched my eyelids, and his fingers were as soft as sleep; and like the eyes of an eagle that is frightened my prophetic eyes were awakened. He touched my ears and he filled them with noise and with sound: and I heard the Heavens shuddering and the flight of the angels in the height, and the moving of the beasts that are under the waters, and the noise of the growth of the branches in the valley. He bent down over me and he looked upon my lips; and he tore out my sinful tongue, and he took away that which is idle and that which is evil with his right hand, and his right hand was dabbled with blood; and he set there in its stead, between my perishing lips, the tongue of a wise serpent. And he clove my breast asunder with a sword, and he plucked out my trembling heart, and in my cloven breast he set a burning coal of fire. Like a corpse in the desert I lay, and the voice of God called and said unto me, 'Prophet, arise, and take heed, and hear; be filled with my will, and go forth over the sea and over the land and set light with my word to the hearts of the people.'"

IV

LÈRMONTOV (1814–1841)

LÈRMONTOV was descended from a Scotsman, George Learmonth, who was present at the siege of a small Polish town in 1613.

He had always been connected with the army : his father was an officer, his mother a young girl, at the time of her marriage, of noble birth : she died at the age of twenty. He was brought up by his maternal grandmother, who only permitted him to visit his father on very rare occasions. He was in all respects very lonely, entirely without society or friendship, excellently educated by the very best tutors in noble tastes and refined manners, with such success that he knew French, German and English thoroughly before he was twelve. If ever he saw a serf being punished he would immediately give vent to his anger by attacking the torturer with a knife or stones.

He was, in spite of his fondness for other languages, tenacious of his own, and a great lover of Russia. "In the Russian folklore," he wrote when he was fifteen, "told from mouth to mouth there is probably more than in the whole of French literature."

But it was the Caucasus that first led him to creative art. He was ten when he first accompanied his grandmother to that land, whither she went in search of health. It is, I think, worth while to dwell on the beauties of this country in order to see quite what sort of scenery it was that so fascinated the child's mind.

In his fifteenth and sixteenth year Lèrmontov was educated at the University Pension at Moscow, and filled all his exercise-books with poetry, all of which betrayed a deeply impressionable, passionate, highly strung nature, permeated with views quite extraordinary in one so young.

The two years following saw him a member of the University proper, consciously isolating himself from his contemporaries in spite of adequate means ; on the other hand, he launched into the sea of fashionable society life.

The influence of an unending round of balls, masquerades and supper-parties prompted him to write drinking songs and epigrams which could not be tolerated by the Press, while at the same time he showed an extraordinary power of detaching himself from vulgarity and giving himself up to his work. Always he would invest his productions with mockery and sarcasm.

During his second year he left Moscow on account of a row which he got into over an unpopular professor, and went to Petrograd, where he joined the fashionable Yunker's School, and learnt some of the joys of military life.

Half his time was occupied in revelling, the other half in seeking some remote class-room where he could work and satisfy his craving to write.

At the age of nineteen he was commissioned and gazetted in the Life Guard Hussars, already the author of *The Demon*, though that poem was still in manuscript. A satirical comedy was censored, and other poems began to appear in the reviews, so that not only the literary circles but Society looked with keen expectation for something good at his hands.

One of his poems in particular at this time attracted attention: it is the author's prayer in dedicating a girl to the Virgin. It was so sincere and simple in its religious tone that some of his critics declared that it was merely a pose of his. They failed to realise that his sanctuary was his supreme elation of love for a girl who answered his feelings by friendship. Lèrmontov loathed the idea of the marriage bond—real love was to him something far higher: his Vàrenka, who married another, was his kindred spirit. She it was whom he dedicated to the Virgin, and this relationship finds expression in several of his poems.

For five years he remained in his regiment, and during this time translated Byron, Heine and Goethe . . . then in 1837 came the blow of Pushkin's death, which stung Lèrmontov to such a pitch of fury that he wrote his immortal ode, *On the Death of Pushkin*, which became at once known and repeated throughout the length and

breadth of Russia by people who repeated it to, and copied it from, one another:

"And you, the proud and shameless progeny
Of fathers famous for their infamy,
You, who with servile heel have trampled down
The fragments of great names laid low by chance,
You, hungry crowd that swarms about the throne,
Butchers of freedom, and genius, and glory,
You hide behind the shelter of the law,
Before you, right and justice must be dumb!
But, parasites of vice, there's God's assize;
There is an awful court of law that waits.
You cannot reach it with the sound of gold;
It knows your thoughts beforehand and your deeds;
And vainly you shall call the lying witness;
That shall not help you any more;
And not with all the filth of all your gore
Shall you wash out the poet's righteous blood."

For this daring outburst he was arrested, tried and banished to the Caucasus, which again acted, as in his childhood, as a direct inspiration. New poems came flying to Petrograd full of human passions, and descriptions of a Nature prodigal and passionate as her devoted lover. No geography book could ever give such a vivid picture of the Caucasus as Lèrmontov's verse and prose. As the Arabs say: "They turn our hearing into seeing." Fame at last descended upon him. Then appeared the *Song of the Tsar Ivàn Vasìlyevich, the young Opriknik, and the Brave Merchant Kalàshinkov*," in which the Opriknik insults the merchant's wife, and the merchant challenges him to fight with his fists, kills him and is executed for it. The poem is written as a folk-song, in the style of the *Byliny*: as an epic there is nothing in modern Russian literature to compare with it for simplicity, appropriateness of tone, vividness, truth to nature and terseness.

Every line begins with an anapæst, followed by some odd dactyls, and ends in a dactyl unrhymed. It has been translated by Madame Voynich admirably, and is published by Elkin Mathews.

While in the Caucasus, his age being now twenty-three,

Lèrmontov finished *The Demon*, on which he had been at work for so long.

The personality of this Demon, the Spirit of Exile, is quite different from the Satanic Mephistopheles or Lucifer. With all his contempt for Earth, Lèrmontov's Demon is fascinating in every way. He is always musing over his former days in Heaven, and vainly seeking some relief in the desert of time and space into which he is cast out *alone*; he is the embodiment of the idea of loneliness in a proud soul. His sudden love for the Gruzian girl Tamàra inflames him with the desire of abandoning his pride, of opening his heart to Good, of making peace with Heaven . . . we are never allowed to forget that the Angel and the Demon had been brothers. Moved by his love, the Demon is on the verge of humility and of opening his heart to Goodness when his pride and hatred return upon him, due entirely to the tone of enmity which the Angel adopts on meeting him. The Angel is a good hater and thorough in his scornfulness. Being Tamàra's celestial guardian, he becomes quite human and understandable when he meets the Demon (whom he might have conquered by greeting him with Heavenly grace) with icy contempt and threats. Here we have a perfect delineation of the kinship between the spirits of good and evil.

The Demon's wooing of Tamàra is irresistibly bewitching, one of the most passionate love declarations ever written, in couplets of sonorous iambics that glow like jewels and tremble like the strings of a harp. Tamàra yields to him (what human girl could have done otherwise?) and forfeits her life, but her soul is borne off to Heaven by the Angel: by death she has expiated her offence, and the Demon is left as before desolate in a loveless universe.

Owing to his grandmother's persistence Lèrmontov was recalled before one of his five years' exile had elapsed, and we see him again in Petrograd with his old regiment, a tremendous source of interest to all society, half of whom hated, while half loved him.

In 1838 *Duma* appeared, in which Lèrmontov gave to the world his view of his contemporaries: it was the severest indictment imaginable, far saner and truer than Byron's, not of the great Russian nation of course, but of

the shallow side of that human nature to which he had allied himself. How clear he was of the shortcomings of that lot of people to which he himself, at least outwardly, belonged, and how deeply it hurt him is proved by the exquisite precision with which he exercised his lancet of lampoon.

It is in form a perfect example of his rhymed and scanned prose as it were—that is, not a single word would have to be altered or shifted if you wanted to write it out in prose. It is the work not of a superficial satirist, but of a deep and profound thinker, of a Shelley rather than a Byron.

In 1840 he was challenged to a duel by a son of the French ambassador, in which Lèrmontov fired his shot in the air and received himself a slight scratch. For this he was again arrested and banished as before to the Caucasus. This, the last year of his life, he spent at Patigorsk, a town forming the centre of a fashionable healing-springs district, at the foot of a mountain range. Here he wrote his only novel in prose, *The Hero of Our Times*, as great a piece of artistry as anything that he did in poetry. It is the first psychological novel in Russia. The hero, Pechorin by name, was undoubtedly Lèrmontov himself, although he said, and quite probably thought, that he was merely creating a type.

This Pechorin is an officer in the Caucasus, who analyses his own character, and lays bare his weaknesses, follies and faults with extreme candour and frankness. "I am incapable of friendship," he says. "Of two friends, one is always the slave of the other, although often neither of them will admit it: I cannot be a slave, and to be a master is a tiring business."

Or again: "I have an innate passion for contradiction . . . the presence of enthusiasm turns me to ice, and intercourse with a phlegmatic temperament would turn me into a passionate dreamer."

On the eve of fighting a duel he writes:

"If I die it will not be a great loss to the world, and as for me, I am sufficiently tired of life. I am like a man yawning at a ball, who does not go home to bed because the carriage is not there, but as soon as the carriage is there, Good-bye! I review my past and I ask myself,

Why have I lived? Why was I born? And I think there was a reason, and I think I was called to high things, for I feel in my soul the presence of vast powers: but I did not divine my high calling: I gave myself up to the allurement of shallow and ignoble passions: I emerged from their furnace as hard and as cold as iron, but I had lost for ever the ardour of noble aspirations, the flower of life. And since then how often have I played the part of the axe in the hands of fate. Like the weapon of the Executioner I have fallen on the necks of the victims, often without malice, always without pity. My love has never brought happiness, because I have never in the slightest degree sacrificed myself for those whom I loved. I loved for my own sake, for my own pleasure. . . . And if I die I shall not leave behind me one soul who understood me. Some think I am better, others that I am worse than I am. Some will say he was a good fellow: others he was a blackguard."

From this it may be easily seen that Lèrmontov must have been a most trying companion. He had an impossible temperament, proud, exasperated, filled with a savage amour-propre: he took a childish delight in annoying: he was envious of that which was least enviable in his contemporaries. When he could not make himself successful—that is, felt—by pleasant, he would choose unpleasant means, and yet in spite of all this he was warm-hearted, thirsting for love and kindness and capable of giving himself up to love—if he chose.

During the course of this second banishment he took an active part in the fighting with the Circassian tribes, showing striking courage combined with perfect modesty.

This experience was the direct inspiration of *Valèrik*, one of the most beautiful of his long poems on the Caucasus.

After this came his second duel. On this occasion he somehow contrived to offend a somewhat posing officer called Major Martỳnov, who could not bear Lèrmontov's jokes in the presence of ladies. As before, Lèrmontov fired his pistol into the air, but Martỳnov aimed so long that the seconds began to remonstrate. He then fired and killed Lèrmontov immediately.

As a result Martỳnov only escaped the anger of the mob by being arrested.

In 1909 Merejkòvski produced a little book on Lèrmontov as a counterblast to one by Solovyòv in which Martynov was hailed as "Heaven's weapon sent to punish blood-thirstiness and devilish lust." It is a blessing indeed that Solovyòv should have been led to attack Lèrmontov, for Merejkòvski was thus brought to criticise Lèrmontov with an amazingly accurate insight. He loved the poet and so his appreciation is the more perfect. "Something like Solovyòv's attitude towards Lèrmontov," he says, "must have been in the minds of the poet's contemporaries and successors. Even Dostoievski mentions him as the 'spirit of wrath.' Nicholas I. expressed grim pleasure at his death. He has been up till now the scapegoat of Russian literature. All Russian writers preach humility, even those who began by heading revolts —Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoievski, Tolstoi . . . here is the one single man who never gave in and never submitted to his last breath . . . he is the Cain of Russian literature and has been killed by Abel, the spirit of humility. Solovyòv's cry of 'Devilish superman' is only another proof of the fact that the struggle between superhumanism and deo-humanism is the eternal problem of life." Merejkòvski's idea is that Lèrmontov could remember the past of his eternity . . . from the ordinary human mind this previous existence is excluded, we dwell on the eternity to come . . . but Lèrmontov never did: his mind was concentrated on what he saw left behind him. From the very first his poetry attracts you uneasily: you may—Russian youths often are—be taught to hate him as a "spring of poison" . . . he knew the harrowing threat of fruitless ages. Even as a boy he frequently said: "If only I could forget the unforgettable." His Demon is never permitted to forget the past. He lives by what is death to others.

Pechorin, in *The Hero of our Days*, speaks as Lèrmontov when he says: "I never forget anything—anything."

In one of his poems he laments that his despair is that no love lasts through eternity: he means *his* eternity. He knows of a kind of existence which is neither this life, nor death as promised by Christianity. That existence is not deprived of love: his idea is that the less earthly, the deeper and greater the passion becomes. The difference

between Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations* and Lèrmontov's is that Wordsworth speaks of these intimations coming to him from outside this world and Lèrmontov speaks from the outside world himself, as one belonging to it, while realising his temporary existence in this world to which he does not belong. This attitude was a continual torment to him; it made him feel very much of a stranger.

"Usually," says Merejkòvski, "artists find their creation beautiful because nothing like it has existed before." Lèrmontov feels the beauty just where it had been always. That is why there is something so individual and inimitable in him when he speaks of Nature: 'For several moments spent among the wilderness of rocks where I played as a child I would give Paradise and Eternity.'

"He is in love with Nature. He longs to blend in an embrace with the storm and Shelley-like catches of lightnings with his hands. It is the only non-earthly love for earth to be found in poetry. Christianity is a movement from here—thither: Lèrmontov's poetry is from there—hither. He was not-quite-a-man encased in a man's shell. He tried to conceal this, because people do not forgive anyone for being unlike them. Hence his reticence, which people mistook for pride. They thought he was untruthful, posing . . . while in reality it was his tragedy that he felt out of place here and tried to be like everyone else. This explains his escape into the sphere of dissipations, his cruel attitude towards the girl he deserted . . . when he could feel that at last he was like his contemporaries.

"The fourth dimension seemed to be squeezed into the three for a while, and the icy horror of eternity and the inane temporarily forgotten in the warmth of human vulgarity."

This, Merejkòvski thinks, accounts for that amazing child-likeness in Lèrmontov which dwelt side by side with his pessimism, sadness, bitterness, flippancy and sarcasm. He could always play children's games to the state of self-forgetfulness and had no fear of death, because he *knew* that there was no death.

"His Demon never laughs and never lies; he has something of the child-like in him. He is always genuine, as

far removed as possible from Gogol's spirit of mischief or Dostoievsky's wicked, sneering Devil. Lèrmontov's Devil is beautiful, because he is not thought out, but suffered out by the poet himself; he is hardly a devil at all."

There is a legend that once there was a fight between God and Satan and some of the angels were undecided which side to take. In order to help them to make up their mind they were sent to be born on earth, where they should dwell for a little in a limited world: the soul of Lèrmontov had been in his past one of these. That is why his duality was always such a burden to him. This explains many queer things about Lèrmontov: his amazingly deep passion for a girl of nine when he was ten ("I did not know whence she came") and his having drawn a detailed picture of his death many times before his final duel: most strange of all is Merejkòvski's idea that Lèrmontov remembered the future of eternity. Pushkin is the day-luminary of Russian poetry and Lèrmontov is the night-luminary: "It is high time to rise after our final stage of humility and start on our last revolt, and remember that besides Pushkin we have Lèrmontov and his message to the world. . . . Because in the end Satan will make peace with God."

He owed nothing to his contemporaries, little to his predecessors and still less to foreign models.

As a schoolboy he imitated Byron, merely echoes these, however, of his reading. Shelley urged him as Byron urged Pushkin to emulation, not imitation. His pride and obstinacy if nothing else would have made him carve out his own path: he chose the narrow path of romance, the Turner method rather than the Constable in his depictions of landscape, as may be seen in *Mtsysi*, the story of a Circassian orphan educated in a convent, who has ungovernable longings for freedom: he escapes, loses his way in the forest and is brought back after three days, dying from exhaustion and starvation. The greater portion of the poem is given up to his confession: he then tells how insatiable were his desires to seek out his own home and people: he describes his wanderings, hearing the song of a girl . . . seeing at nightfall the light of a dwelling-place twinkling like a fallen star, but afraid to seek it. He then kills a panther and in the morning finds

a way out of the woods and lies exhausted in the grass under the blinding sun of noon. He then fancies in his delirium that he is lying at the bottom of a deep stream; the fish sing to him in a voice so unearthly that he is enticed and allured as if the fish were the Erl-King's daughter.

In *The Testament* he rises to an unadorned realism that is little short of magic in its poignancy:

"'I want to be alone with you,
A moment quite alone.
The minutes left to me are few,
They say I'll soon be gone.
And you'll be going home on leave,
Then say . . . but why? I do believe
There's not a soul who'll greatly care
To hear about me over there.

And yet if someone asks you there,
Let us suppose they do—
Tell them a bullet hit me here,
The chest—and it went through.
And say I died, and for the Tsar,
And say what fools the doctors are:—
And that I shook you by the hand,
And thought about my native land.

My father and my mother, too!
They may be dead by now:
To tell the truth, it wouldn't do
To grieve them anyhow.
If one of them is living, say
I'm bad at writing home and they
Have sent me to the front, you see—
And that they needn't wait for me.

We had a neighbour, as you know,
And you remember, I
And she . . . How very long ago
It is we said good-bye.
She won't ask after me, nor care,
But tell her everything, don't spare
Her empty heart; and let her cry:—
To her it doesn't signify.'"

It is such a poem that led Baring to apply to Lèrmontov what Arnold said about Byron and Wordsworth: "there are moments when Nature takes the pen from his hand and writes for him." When one passes in review the vast output of his short life, we are struck by the lyrical inspiration, the strength and intensity, the concentration of his power, the wealth of his imagination, his gorgeous colouring and maintained high level.

It is as though he combined the temperament of a Thackeray with the wings of a Shelley, so exquisitely blended is his romantic sense and stern realism. So simple and straightforward is he that his style escapes notice in its absolute appropriateness, as in *The Testament*. There is none of the misty vagueness of Keats or Coleridge; he never follows Shelley into the intense inane.

I propose to conclude this chapter with extracts from his masterpiece, *The Demon*, to illustrate, if I can, the amazing achievement of this Lucifer-spirit. He opens with a description of his hero-devil ruminating over his past:

> "When, thirsting for eternal knowledge,
> He keenly followed through the mist
> The caravans of wandering planets
> Thrown into vastness; when he list—
> The happy first-born of creation—
> To voice of Faith and Love, and knew
> No doubt or hatred; and there was
> No threat of ages fruitless, dreary,
> Awaiting him in even rows . . ."

Now an outcast:

> "He planted sin without enjoyance;
> His art has never met contest,
> Has quickly lost its charm and zest,
> And has become a mere annoyance."

We follow him in his exile over the world through the Caucasus to Gruzia:

> "A blissful, brilliant nook of Earth!
> 'Mid stately ancient pillared ruins,
> Reluctent, gurgling rivulets run
> And ripple over motley pebbles;

Between them, rose-trees where the birds
Sing love-songs, while the ivy girds
The stems, and crowns the foliage-temples
Of green chinàra ; and the herds
Of timid red-deer seek the boon
Of mountain eaves in sultry noon ;
And sparkling life, and rustling leaves,
And hum of voices hundred-toned,
The sweetly breathing thousand plants,
Voluptuous heat of skies sun-laden,
Caressive dew of gorgeous night,
And stars—as clear as eyes of maiden,
As glance of Grùzian maiden bright !
But all this brilliancy of Nature
Awoke not in the Demon's soul
A moment's joy, nor tender feeling."

We are now introduced to the heroine, Tamàra, whose wedding feast is being prepared :

" Amid her friends, the whole day long
Tamàra spent in play and song.
The sun, behind a far-off mountain,
Is half set in a sea of gold.
The maidens in a round are sitting
And, to a lilting tune they're singing
They clap in time. Tamàra takes
Her tambourine, and nimbly shakes
It o'er her head ; with fleeting motion
Now trips it lighter than a bird,
Now holds a-sudden in her dance,
And casts a shining, roguish glance
From underneath the jealous lashes ;
Her eyebrow curves in coy expression,
Her lithesome shape does swift incline,
And o'er the carpet slides and flashes
Her little foot of form divine. . . .
The Demon did behold her. . . . Rapture
And awe possessed him : and at once
The silent desert of his spirit
Rang suddenly with joyful tones ;
And once again the sacred grandeur

Of Love and Good and Beauty shone
Within his soul. . . .
He felt a sadness strangely new—
As if the overwhelming shower
Of feelings rang with words he knew.
Was this a sign of renovation ?
Gone were the words of dread temptation,
His mind no more in guile adept.
Will he forget his past ? . . . But God
Would never grant him this relief,
Nor he forgetfulness accept."

Tamàra's bridegroom-elect is foully done to death on his way to the wedding. The bride, fallen on her bed, sobs with a lorn and piteous feeling until she suddenly hears a voice of magic sweetness urging her to cease.

" ' Forsooth, the destiny of mortals,
Believe me, angel upon earth ' " (sings the voice),
" ' Is not—not for a single moment
Of thy dear child-like sorrow worth ! ' "

He beseeches her to listen to his pleas:

" ' As soon as night throws silky veiling
O'er Caucasus, and all the world
Grows still and fairy-like, bewitched
By Nature's magic wand and word ;
As soon as zephyrs flutter shyly
Across the faded grass, and gaily
Flies out of it the lurking bird ;
As soon as under vine and maize
The flowers of night find dew, and raise
Unfolding petals with relief :
As soon as from behind the mountains
The golden crescent glides, and steals
A glance upon thee furtively—
I shall fly down each night to thee,
Shall guard till dawn thy virgin slumber,
And on thy lashes dreams of amber
I'll waft, to woo them prettily. . . .' "

We are not surprised that fire began to flow along the maiden's veins as she listened to so exquisite a speech.

She decides to enter a nunnery to avoid both marriage and the hellish spirit that assails her in dreams. The Devil follows :

> " But, filled with fear of sanctity,
> He dared not boldly force an entrance
> And violate the sanctuary.
> Then for a moment was he fain
> To give up his hell-dark device."

He catches a glimpse of the glimmering lamplight in Tamàra's window and hears a song in the far distance, a song for earth in heaven born and nourished.

> " Had, then, an angel flown in secret
> To meet him as his friend of yore,
> To sing the byegone joys they cherished,
> And soothe the sufferings he bore ?
> Then first the Demon knew he loved ;
> Knew how he yearned and longed for love.
> In sudden fear, he thought to fly . . .
> But in that first, heart-rending anguish
> His wing was stayed—he had no power !
> And, marvel ! from his veilèd eye
> There dropped a tear. . . . This very hour
> There lieth by Tamàra's tower
> A stone burnt through by flame-like tear—
> Inhuman tear : a sign for aye ! . . ."

As he entered he was met by the guardian angel of the fair sinner, who reproaches the Demon, and bids him begone.

> " The Demon's face
> Lit up with smile of proud derision,
> His look flashed jealousy and scorn,
> And in his soul again awakened
> The former hatred's poisonous thorn."

The guardian angel departs and the Demon is left victor of the field to plead his cause. In answer to Tamàra's question, " ' But who art thou ? Who ? . . . Answer me,' " he replies :

" 'I'm he whose voice has made thee listen
Throughout the midnight's calm and rest;
Whose thoughts have reached thee like a whisper,
Whose vision through thy dreams would glisten,
Whose sadness thou hast dimly guessed. . . .
I am the lord of understanding
And freedom: I am Nature's foe,
The world's despair, and Heaven's woe.
Yet at thy feet I worship thee! . . .
I love thee: I'm thy slave to-day. . . .
What is eternity without thee?
My boundless realm, when I am lonely?' "

Tamàra then asks him why he loves her, to which he replies:

" 'Why do I, fair? I do not know.
Since first the earthly world began,
In my mind's eye imprinted ever
Thine image seemed to fill the ether,
And through eternity it ran.
In Paradise the glorious years
Were lacking only thy creation.
Oh, if thou couldst but comprehend
The bitterness of my existence
Through dreary ages' dread consistence. . . .
Oft through the rack and tempest raging,
I rushed at midnight levin-clad,
In fruitless hope of e'er assuaging
My aching heart's revolt and dread,
To kill the pain of mind's regret,
The ne'er forgotten to forget.' "

Tamàra is gradually won to listen to his passionate pleading.

" 'Whoe'er thou art, my friend so mystic,
I list to thee against my will.
I know my peace is lost for ever;
But thou art suffering, and never
I could forget thee suffering still.
But if thy words are false and cunning,
But if thou plannest a deceit . . .

Have mercy. What's to thee this conquest ?
What counts my soul in thy conceit ?
Oh, give thy oath, thy sacred vow :
Thou seest—I fail and suffer now—
Thou seest a woman's tender dreams ! . . .
But fear grows less . . . To me it seems
Thou understand'st and knowest all. . . .
Swear on thy oath, give me a token
That sin and wrong thou wilt renounce.' "

The Demon vows fidelity :

" ' I swear by dawn of the creation,
By the decay of earthly sooth,
By the disgrace of crime and evil,
And by the triumph of the truth.
I swear by flashing hopes of conquest,
I swear by bitter pains of fall,
I swear by having met with thee,
And by the threat of losing all ; . . .
I swear by Hell, I swear by Heaven,
I swear by sacredness, by thee,
Thy latest look my soul enslaving,
Thy first and guileless tear for me ;
By breath from lips so pure and ireless,
Thy silky tresses' wave and shine,
I swear by suffering, elation,
And by my love for thee, divine. . . .
But here's my offer ; all my power
I bring to thee, my sanctuary !
I seek thy love, I need its blessing ;
Thou wilt obtain eternity
For one short moment. Trust my greatness
In love, and wrath, and equity.
I, free and wilful Son of Ether,
Shall take thee high above the stars,
And thou shalt be the Queen of Nature,
My foremost love, eternal treasure,
Whom nothing equals or debars ! . . .
Crowds of ethereal fairy-maidens
Will wait, thy every wish to meet.
The crown which Evening Star is wearing

I'll tear from her, and crown thy head ;
I'll take the dew from evening flowers
To shine on it in diamonds' stead ;
I'll take a sunset ray of scarlet,
And gird thee with its ribbon light ;
I'll saturate the air around thee
With purest fragrance of the night.
A never-dying magic music
Will charm thine ears by fall and swell.
I'll build a palace out of turquoise
And pearls and gold for thee to dwell ;
I'll search for thee the depth of ocean ;
I'll get all riches from the stars ;
I'll give thee every earthly treasure—
But love me . . .'
Closely o'er her bending,
He gently touched Tamàra's trembling
Lips with his lips burning like fire,
Words overwhelming with temptation
Were to her pleading his reply. . . .
The evil spirit was the victor . . .
But poison of his touch inflicted
A fatal blow on child-like breast,
An agonising shriek, through rest
And silence of the hour, broke . . ."

The guardian angel returns and banishes the Demon.

"Then at the spirit of Temptation
An austere glance the Angel bent :
The conquered Demon cursed his longings,
His maddening dreams where love had shone ;
And once again he stood relentless,
In scornful arrogance, and dauntless,
Amidst the Universe—alone."

Comment on such a poem is needless. I have done my part if I have induced you by my brief extracts to go back to the original and read the whole of it for yourselves.

V

GOGOL (1809–1852)

NICHOLAS GOGOL was born in 1809 near Poltava and brought up in affluence by a Cossack grandmother: at school he did but little work, but devoted himself with enthusiasm to drawing and the theatre. In 1829 he obtained a Government office in Petrograd. He then tried the stage, schoolmastering, and obtained a Professorship of History; failing in all these, he turned to literature. His firstfruits brought him to the notice of the famous literary men of his day, and he became a friend of Pushkin, who proved invaluable as critic and adviser.

For seven years he lived in Petrograd, and during this period began his sketches of Little Russian—that is, of South Russian—life in *Evenings on a Farm on the Dikanka* and *Mirgorod*. Little Russia differs from Great Russia in having scattered whitewashed houses in place of the regular streets of the villages of Great Russia: separate little farms surrounded by charming little gardens. It is specially attractive in its more genial climate, warm nights, its musical language, the beauty of its people, their picturesque dress and its lyrical songs. There is, too, more freedom in the relations between young men and young girls; there is none of that seclusion of the women which we meet with in Great Russia. The Little Russians have also preserved numerous traditions and epic poems from the time when they were free Cossacks, fighting against the Poles in the north and the Turks in the south. In Gogol we see a merging of the Great and the Little, for though Little by birth and breeding, he yet wrote in the language of Pushkin and Lèrmontov. From his very first days we feel the richness of his laughter and the whimsical, Puck-like vein of wit which is characteristically Little Russian. It was only later that we feel the unseen tears behind the laughter.

In these we find that quality which we immediately associate with his name, a realism based upon meticulous

observation, but merged into it and permeating his whole work is an eerie romanticism, a delight in the supernatural and a deep religious vein which afterwards dominated all the other qualities. His humour is rich and many-sided, ranging from the broad and farcical to a delicate and half melancholy, and later to an almost Swiftean irony.

Right from the beginning we plunge into an atmosphere that brings us at a bound into the very heart of Russia as no other writer has been able to do. In his first stories we hear of water-nymphs, the devil, witches, magicians; in the second, *Mirgorod*, we find him feeling his way towards realism. *The Quarrel of the Two Ivans* is simply the story of two friends who quarrel over nothing and are just on the point of reconciliation, years after, when the mere mention of the word "goose," which was the prime cause of the quarrel, sets them off again, this time irrevocably. It is in this volume that we come across *Taras Bulba*, now published in the Everyman Edition, a short historical novel in which Cossack life is inimitably set down.

Later in *Arabesques* and the *Tales* he leaves the supernatural altogether, and we get such a story as *The Overcoat*, in which a minor public servant who is always shivering dreams of the day when he can achieve his ambition of owning a warm overcoat. After years of poverty and striving he manages to save enough money to buy one, and on the first day he wears it it is stolen. He dies of melancholia, and his ghost haunts the streets. It sets one thinking at once of that host of failures which exercise so queer a fascination over all later Russian novelists, particularly Dostoievsky.

Interspersed between the stories came the plays. One has to remember in this connection the exceptionally severe censorship of the stage. It is a matter of no little surprise to us on reading *The Inspector-General* to think that such a play should ever have been licensed in such a country. The plot was suggested to Gogol by Pushkin. The officials of an obscure country town hear the startling news that a Government Inspector is arriving incognito to investigate their affairs. An ordinary traveller from Petrograd—an intrepid liar—is mistaken for the Inspector and plays up to his part until the arrival of the real one, when he manages to effect his escape.

As a satire on Russian bureaucracy the play has no rival: nearly every character is dishonest, and it is a delight to see them all taken in by the empty-headed hero with his fluent lying. Of all plays which can count on drawing big houses at holiday-time in Russia this stands easily first. It became a classic as soon as it was produced and it is as irresistible in its appeal now as it was when it was written.

Gogol now left Russia and settled in Rome, never to return to his native country.

It was here that he produced his masterpiece, *Dead Souls*, the great comic work of all Russia. Again it was Pushkin who gave him the idea. The hero of the book, Chichikov, conceives a brilliant idea. Every landlord possessed so many serfs, called "souls." Every ten years a revision took place and the landlord had to pay poll-tax on all the "souls" who had died in that period. Between the periods no one inspected the lists. Chichikov's idea was to take over the dead souls from the landlord, who would, of course, be delighted to get out of the tax by this means; Chichikov would then register his purchases and then mortgage the souls at the rate of three hundred roubles each at a bank in Petrograd or Moscow, representing that they were in some corner of the Crimea, and so make enough money to buy live "souls" of his own.

The book is simply the odyssey of Chichikov all over Russia in his search for these souls: it gives infinite scope to the author, for he can bring in every type of man and woman that he knows. The book was to be divided into three parts, the first of which appeared in 1842: he went on working at the other two parts until 1852, when he died. He twice threw the second part of his work into the fire when it was finished, so we are left with a complete first part and an incomplete second. The third part was probably only sketched. In the second part he meant to show us the moral regeneration of Chichikov: apparently he could not bring himself to believe that he had done this adequately, and he came to be more and more of an ascetic and a recluse as the years passed.

So here once more we get that extraordinary "break" in mid-flight which is so peculiar a characteristic of all Russian writers.

The book made an immediate and lasting impression upon the country. It pleased some by its reality, its artistry and its social ideas; it pleased the Slavophils by its truth to life and its smell of Russia. When Gogol read the first chapter to his master, Pushkin, the latter remarked: "God! what a sad country Russia is!"—a queer comment, you may think, for the most humorous book that Russia has produced. But the truth is that, comic as the best chapters are, Gogol refuses to flatter either his country or the people who inhabit it, and in Chichikov, just as in Oblomov, most readers find themselves wondering whether after all there is not a good deal of the character there portrayed in themselves, some such scoundrelly ideas, at any rate in embryo. But Chichikov is so shameless, so entertaining, so magnificent a liar, so plausible, so ingenious, in a word, so Falstaffian that he enchants us all. He is always human and the least of a hypocrite imaginable.

In fact Gogol goes further than most satirists in other countries and having laid bare his baseness, turns round and tells us that we have no cause to be angry with him: Chichikov is, after all, only the victim of circumstances, of the ruling passion of gain: like all his countrymen, he is indulgent and charitable: he cannot be brought to condemn. He sees the mean and the common, but he does not conclude from that that life is either of these. Rather does he infer the opposite. Chichikov is great just as Napoleon was great, the victim of a ruling passion and great by reason of it. Our minds immediately turn to Dostoievsky once more, to *Crime and Punishment*, where the chief character tries to be the victim of a ruling passion, not this time of rascality, but fails.

Dead Souls is not unlike *Don Quixote*. It has the same depth: it makes boys laugh, young men think and old men weep.

Its influence was as great on its merits taken as a work of art as on its other sides of philosophy and ideas. Gogol for ever liberated fiction from the grand style. By writing a novel without any love interest, with such a rascal as Chichikov for hero, he created Russian realism. There is no exaggeration, no caricature; there is the instinctive economy, the sense of selection of the true artist.

Just as Pushkin showed his countrymen that there was

such a thing as Russian landscape, so Gogol showed them what an inexhaustible mine of humour, absurdity, irony and quaintness lay in the ordinary life of ordinary people.

In 1847 *Passages from a Correspondence with a Friend* was published, which changed the opinions of many of his followers from worship to disgust, for he there preached a lesson of abject humility and submission to the Government in matters both temporal and spiritual.

He had shown up the evils of Bureaucracy, his enemies said, therefore it was inconsistent in him not to resist the powers, but he had shown up the evils of misers, the obstinacy of old women, and many other things: he had never pretended to be a Liberal.

His bent lay in the direction of devotion: he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, spending all his money in charity and his time in religious study. There are those who lament that by reason of this we have lost much rich humour, but it may at least be open to question whether we should have possessed so rich a legacy as he has left us had it not been for that very intensity of feeling which caused him to renounce his art, an art which he looked upon as a torch-bearer indicating a higher ideal of living.

While others expended their energies in spreading political ideals in their novels, Gogol was content to give the social element in Russian its prominent and dominating position. He is the living proof, if proof were needed, that realism does not connote a mere anatomy of society, a dwelling upon revolting details, a love of defying convention by fluttering over cesspools and bringing to light the hidden lower things of life. True Realism does not mean Zola, but Gogol—an all-round view of humanity as it is not seen through the smoked glasses of the romancer nor the microscope of the moral scientist.

VI

TURGENEV (1816–1883)

IN Edward Garnett's admirable book on Turgenev Conrad lays his finger with unerring accuracy on the crux of the whole problem with regard to him when he says that we are apt to belittle a consummate artist who is quiet when we compare him with a Titanic, restless genius like Dostoievsky. It is like comparing Jane Austen with Victor Hugo. Incidentally Mr Garnett's book loses much of its value owing to his repeated endeavour to show Turgenev's superiority over Dostoievsky.

As a matter of fact, there is no comparison possible.

Turgenev came of noble birth and began by writing verse, but soon found his proper *métier* in prose.

For two years he was exiled to his country estate for his quite harmless defence of Gogol. After this term was over he left Russia for Baden and Paris, which accounts to some extent for his aloofness from the problems which perturbed his countrymen, and makes him more a Cosmopolitan than National, like Dostoievsky. His five great novels, *Rúdin*, *The Nest of Gentlefolk*, *On the Eve*, *Fathers and Sons* and *Smoke*, all appeared in the eleven years between 1856 and 1867 and he was at once appraised by all European critics, who discovered in him Russia for the first time, and the Russian woman in particular. His popularity at home was impaired on the publication of *Fathers and Sons*, because the revolutionaries saw in Bazarov, the hero, only calumny and a libel, whereas the reactionary party looked on the book as a glorification of Nihilism. Thus he fell between two stools. In Europe, however, he gained larger and larger audiences, until an admiration for his work became the hall-mark of good taste.

But to-day Turgenev holds his own even in his own country, for his exquisite style, the majesty of his poetry and the sureness of his characterisation. Baring finds a parallel to Turgenev in this country in Tennyson, in that

they are both Mid-Victorian, both shut off from the world by the trees of old parks; but Major Baring, as it seems to me, is fair to neither genius.

For Turgenev has an amazing insight into men's motives and actions which we do not commonly associate with those who are shut off from the world.

Rúdin is a picture of a type that peculiarly appealed to Turgenev, the Hamlet type of man who can only unpack his heart with words, but breaks down when he is asked to translate his theories into action: he is passionately devoted to Liberty in his eloquent talk and makes Natasha, the daughter of the house in which he is staying, fall madly in love with him and persuade herself that she is ready to fly with him, but he, whose love is more that of the intellect than the heart, fails her and tells her to submit.

He is eventually killed in '48 on a barricade in Paris. In the epilogue we get his character beautifully unfolded to us.

"'I know him well,' continued Lézhneff, 'I am aware of his faults. They are the more conspicuous because he is not to be regarded on a small scale.'

"'His is a character of genius!' cried Bassístoff.

"'Genius very likely he has!' replied Lézhneff, 'but as for character . . . That's just his misfortune: there's no force of character in him. . . . But I want to speak of what is good, of what is rare in him. He has enthusiasm; and, believe me, who am a phlegmatic person enough, that is the most precious quality in our times. We have all become insufferably reasonable, indifferent, and slothful; we are asleep and cold, and thanks to any one who will wake us up and warm us! It is high time! Do you remember, Sásha, once when I was talking to you about him, I blamed him for coldness? I was right, and wrong too, then. The coldness is in his blood—that is not his fault—and not in his head. He is not an actor, as I called him, nor a cheat, nor a scoundrel; he lives at other people's expense, not like a swindler, but like a child. . . . Yes; no doubt he will die somewhere in poverty and want; but are we to throw stones at him for that? He never does anything himself precisely, he has no vital force, no blood; but who has the right to say that he has not been of use,

that his words have not scattered good seeds in young hearts, to whom Nature has not denied, as she has to him, powers for action, and the faculty of carrying out their own ideas? Indeed, I myself, to begin with, have gained all that I have from him. Sásha knows what Rúdin did for me in my youth. I also maintained, I recollect, that Rúdin's words could not produce an effect on men; but I was speaking then of men like myself, at my present age, of men who have already lived and been broken in by life. One false note in a man's eloquence, and the whole harmony is spoiled for us; but a young man's ear, happily, is not so over-fine, not so trained. If the substance of what he hears seems fine to him, what does he care about the intonation? The intonation he will supply for himself!'

"'Bravo, bravo!' cried Bassístoff, 'that is justly spoken! And as regards Rúdin's influence, I swear to you, that man not only knows how to move you, he lifts you up; he does not let you stand still, he stirs you to the depths and sets you on fire!'"

In *A Nobleman's Retreat* we find a man, Lavrètsiy by name, separated from his wife, who meets a good, honest girl, by name Liza: they fall in love with one another: for a moment they are led to believe that his wife is dead, but she reappears and Liza goes to a convent.

But it is in the next two novels, *On the Eve* and *Fathers and Sons*, that we see Turgenev at his best.

On the Eve is a deep and penetrating diagnosis of the destinies of the Russia of the fifties.

The central figure of the novel is Elena, who comes near to being the most completely successful heroine in all fiction. We know her through and through, and she is, as are all Turgenev's heroines, well worth knowing. "Her strength of will, her serious, courageous, proud soul, her capacity for passion, all the play of her delicate idealistic nature troubled by the contradictions, aspirations, and unhappiness that the dawn of love brings to her, all this is conveyed to us by the simplest and the most consummate art." Her confession (in her diary) of her discovery that she loved the Bulgarian Insarov is in itself an amazing revelation of the working of a young girl's heart. Every side of her nature is shown us. We see her from her father's point of view, which is contemptuous; from her

mother's, which is that of affectionate bewilderment; from one of her lovers (Shubin's), which is petulantly critical; from another of her lovers (Bevsenyev's), which is half-hearted enthralment; from Insarov's, which recognises her greatness of soul and sincerity of purpose.

Turgenev's magnificent clear-sightedness never manifests itself so sustainedly as in this book. Not only does each of the characters breathe and move and live from the first page, but politically too the author precisely hits off with his pen the Russian temperament. Of all the great Russian writers he is the least diffuse, the most of an artist. He is, after all, as he himself confessed, not so much a Russian as a cosmopolitan, a citizen of Europe, and it is his mission to stand aloof and describe with absolute impartiality the various types that come before his eye without seeking to make his puppets conform to his own ideas or using them as a peg on which to hang a thesis of his own.

The foundation of his art lies in his portraits of women. Pure, virginal, heroic, self-sacrificing, boundless in their love and devotion to a man or cause, they form a gallery worthy to be set by the side of Shakespeare's and Meredith's heroines. They are very flesh and blood, very woman, and yet altogether fascinating, adorable, steadfast, superbly endowed with all the gifts that make for nobility of soul.

Over the creation of these Turgenev showed himself to be deeply sensitive, responsive to all that is best in the feminine mind, of shrewd insight, unfailingly generous, absolutely sane and level-headed. So perfect is his sense of balance, so consummate his artistry, that his work has been unduly depreciated by some critics: they do not easily forgive perfection of form, absolute harmony of style, a sense of proportion so exquisitely poised as his.

He reminds us again of Meredith in his highly intellectual conception as in his portraits of women. He became almost uncannily prophetic in his utterances about the educated classes and their ideals.

He is so interested in characterisation that he needs no incidents to show the growth of his characters: indeed we are almost taken aback by such a dramatic situation

as that of the drunken German being thrown into the lake by Insarov. We feel that the play of character upon character is enough, without fortuitous circumstances of this sort . . . but there is never anything repulsively inartistic in his work.

He is melancholy, and there is a strain of sadness throughout all Turgenev's work, but he is restrained: he never gives way to his emotions. He loves mankind even though he is clear-sighted with regard to his failings. As a philosopher he sees no reason to trust in man nor to think much of him: particularly does he lament the absence of men in Russia.

"'O great philosopher of the Russian world!' says Shubin to Uvar Ivanovitch, 'every word of yours is worth its weight in gold, and it's not to me but to you a statue ought to be raised, and I would undertake it. There, as you are lying now, in that pose: one doesn't know which is uppermost in it, sloth or strength! . . .

"'We have no one yet, no men, look where you will. Everywhere—either small fry, nibblers, Hamlets on a small scale, self-absorbed, or darkness and subterranean chaos, or idle babblers and wooden sticks. Or else they are like this: they study themselves to the most shameful detail and are for ever feeling the pulse of every sensation and reporting to themselves: "That's what I feel, that's what I think." A useful, rational occupation! When will our time be? When will men be born among us?'"

This is not the man to flatter where praise is not deserved. He rather realises than idealises, and that is why it is so exhilarating and refreshing to come into contact with his women, for we can be sure that he paints as he sees and not as he would wish to see. He believes in his women and makes us believe in them. Stranger still is the discovery that he always draws from life. "I ought to confess," he once wrote, "that I never attempted to create a type without having, not an idea, but a living person, on whom the various elements were harmonised together, to work from. I have always needed some groundwork on which I could tread firmly." To such purpose did he do this in *Fathers and Sons* that he roused hostility of so savage a nature that he never afterwards

became popular in Russia during his lifetime. On the other hand, "I received congratulations," he said, "almost caresses, from people of the opposite camp, from enemies. This confused me, wounded me; but my conscience did not reproach me. I knew very well I had carried out honestly the type I had sketched, carried it out not only without prejudice, but positively with sympathy."

The type which he here speaks of is, of course, the Nihilist, Bazarov. His readers were swayed by party passion and consequently were unable to accept the portrait as a work of art. The fast-increasing antipathy between the old and new made the reactionaries, who hailed in this novel the picture of the insidious revolutionary ideas current in young Russia, ironically congratulate the former champion of Liberalism on his penetration and honesty in unmasking the Nihilist: the younger generation saw only a caricature of itself. "The whole ground of the misunderstanding," wrote Turgenev, "lay in the fact that the type of Bazarov had not time to pass through the usual phases. At the very moment of his appearance the author attacked him. It was a new method as well as a new type I introduced. . . . . The reader is easily thrown into perplexity when the author does not show clear sympathy or antipathy to his own child. The reader readily gets angry. . . . After all, books exist to entertain."

And what is Bazarov? Let us listen again to Turgenev: "I dreamed of a sombre, savage and great figure, only half emerged from barbarism, strong, méchant, and honest, and nevertheless doomed to perish because it is always in advance of the future."

Mr Garnett calls him the bare mind of Science first applied to politics. His watchword is not "Negation," as all his critics averred, but Reality.

His creator, whose first and last words to young writers was, "You need truth, remorseless truth, as regards your own sensations," was driven to confess that he shared all Bazarov's convictions except those on Art. He stands at the dividing-line between the religion of the Past which is Faith and that of the future which is Science. His savage egoism is necessary if he is to break away from all the old laws and customs that men held sacred. His aversion from Art and Poetry is simply due to his refusal to be hood-

winked by glamour. The Englishman sees in him merely the quintessence of bad form, bad taste, bad manners and colossal conceit, but in reality he stands for Humanity awakened from age-old superstitions, Aggression, destroyed in his destroying: he must needs stand alone, and delights in doing so. Despising honour, success, public opinion, he allows nothing, not even love, to come between him and his fixity of purpose.

He towers above all the other people in the novel. If there still remain any who have so far held out against the fascination and consummate mastery of Turgenev, I would ask them to turn again to the twenty-seventh chapter of *Fathers and Sons* and read aloud the account of Bazarov's last hours. Anything more poignant, more simple and yet more effective than the last scene of the parents at the grave does not exist: there Turgenev in one stroke epitomises the infinite aspiration, the eternal insignificance of the life of man.

So quietly does the artist work that hasty readers fail to realise his greatness after the storm and stress of Dostoievsky or the titanic canvases of Tolstoy: he lacked exuberance: his men are, Hamlet-like, unable to make mouths at the invisible event, ineffectual, their native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought —it is left to his women to be independent, to know their own minds, to be courageous, pure, crystal-clear, simple, strong, no longer mere sexual incidents in a man's life, but helping companions. In his love of language and his power of making us breathe the air of his landscapes he affords an interesting parallel to Tennyson: we find an echo of him in Elena's diary: "To be good is not enough: to do good—yes, that is the great thing in life."

But where he is most himself and most a genius is in his wonderful capacity for making his characters all reveal themselves in the ordinary details of daily life.

VII

GONCHAROV (1812–1891)

GONCHAROV is important from the English point of view through one book alone. But this novel, *Oblòmov*, far transcends in value many far more famous books that we should do better to leave unread until we have appreciated this most Russian of the Russian works of art.

Oblòmov, the hero of the novel, is a nobleman whose main characteristic is lack of initiative, due primarily to the indolence caused by riches.

"'From my earliest childhood,'" Oblòmov asks, "'have I myself ever put on my socks?'"

We see him first in his lodgings in Petrograd in bed: he is too lazy to get up. Not that he lacked interest in life.

"The joy of higher inspirations was accessible to him," Goncharov writes; "the miseries of mankind were not strange to him. Sometimes he cried bitterly in the depths of his heart about human sorrows. He felt unnamed, unknown sufferings and sadness, and a desire of going somewhere far away—probably into that world towards which his friend Stoltz had tried to take him in his younger days. Sweet tears would then flow upon his cheeks. It would also happen that he would himself feel hatred towards human vices, towards deceit, towards the evil which is spread all over the world; and he would then feel the desire to show mankind its diseases. Thoughts would then burn within him, rolling in his head like waves in the sea; they would grow into decisions which would make all his blood boil; his muscles would be ready to move, his sinews would be strained, intentions would be on the point of transforming themselves into decisions. . . . Moved by a moral force, he would rapidly change over and over again his position in his bed; with a fixed stare he would half lift himself from it, move his hand, look about with inspired eyes . . . the inspiration would seem ready to realise itself, to transform itself into an act of heroism, and then,

what miracles, what admirable results might one not expect from so great an effort! But—the morning would pass away, the shades of evening would take the place of the broad daylight, and with them the strained forces of Oblomoff would incline towards rest—the storms in his soul would subside—his head would shake off the worrying thoughts—his blood would circulate more slowly in his veins—and Oblomoff would slowly turn over, and recline on his back; looking sadly through his window upon the sky, following sadly with his eyes the sun which was setting gloriously behind the neighbouring house—and how many times had he thus followed with his eyes that sunset!"

His landlord wishes him to change his lodgings while his rooms are put into repair. He is terrified at the prospect of going through the trouble of moving.

Later he meets a young girl called Olga, in some ways curiously reminiscent of Turgenev's heroines. She devotes herself to the cause of curing Oblòmov, with whom she falls in love, of his laziness. She tries by every means in her power to rouse him to exert himself in art and literature. At first she seems to succeed: they are about to marry: but his slackness comes over him again; he cannot even take the first necessary steps.

He sinks back into his life of dressing gown and slippers in spite of Olga's splendid efforts to make a man of him. In the end she is compelled to give up the struggle to reform him, and in a parting scene which is as good as anything I know of its kind she describes the sort of life they would lead if she acquiesced in his desires.

"He fell to musing over the words: 'Now or never!' As he listened inwardly to this despairing appeal of reason and will-power, he consciously weighed the little will-power that was left to him, whither he would carry it, into what he would put that paltry remnant. After having pondered over it painfully, he seized the pen, dragged a book out of the corner, and in one hour wanted to read, write, and think all that he had neglected to read, write, and think in ten years. What was he to do now? To go ahead, or to remain? This Oblòmov question was of more import to him than Hamlet's. To go ahead—that would mean at once doffing his comfortable dressing gown, not only from the shoulders, but from the soul and mind; together with

the cobweb on the walls to sweep away the cobweb from the eyes, and regain eyesight! What first step should be made for this? Where begin? 'I do not know—I cannot—no, I am begging the question, I do know, and—— And here is Stolz by my side; he will tell me. What will he tell me? "In a week," he will say, "you must sketch a detailed instruction for your plenipotentiary and send him into the village. Get your Oblòmovka mortgaged, buy some more land, send a plan of new buildings, give up your house, procure a passport, and go abroad for six months, to get rid of your surplus fat, to throw off the weight, to refresh the soul with the atmosphere of which you have dreamed long ago with your friend, to live without a dressing gown, without Zakhar and Tarantev, to put on your own socks and take off your own boots, sleep only at night, travel where all travel, on railroads, steamboats, and then—— Then to settle in Oblòmovka, to find out what sowing and threshing is, why peasants are poor or well-to-do, walk over the fields, go to elections, to the factory, to the mill, the docks. At the same time you are to read newspapers, books, and become excited why the English have sent a warship to the East——" That's what he will say! That's what is meant by going ahead, and thus it is to be all my life! Farewell, poetical ideal of life! That is some kind of a blacksmith shop, not life! There is in it an eternal fire, hammering, heat, din—— But when is one to live? Would it not be better to stay? To stay means to put on a shirt over all, to hear the patter of Zakhar's feet as he jumps down from his couch, to dine with Tarantev, to think less about anything, never to finish the *Voyage to Africa*, to grow peacefully old in these chambers, at the house of Tarantev's lady friend.'

"'Now or never!' 'To be or not to be!' Oblòmov was about to rise from his chair, but his foot did not at once find its way into the slipper, and he sat down again."

The publication of this novel in 1859 produced an instantaneous effect: everyone in Russia who read it recognised something of himself in Oblòmov, and felt the disease of Oblòmovism in his veins.

It is to miss out quite one of the major characteristics of the nation to discount this inertia which pervades every side of life. It is universal in that it expresses ultra-

conservative fights to preserve old customs : Oblòmov is remarkable for his inability to put up any sort of resistance to anything ; he is frightened of everything, even of love : love is disquieting, restless.

There have been many Oblòmovs in real life among even great Russian writers, though it seems paradoxical to think that any man who achieves fame could ever be preternaturally lazy. Krylov is a case in point.

This poet spent most of his days lying on a sofa : one day somebody pointed out to him that the nail on which a picture was hanging just over the sofa was loose, and that the picture would probably fall on his head. "No," said Krylov, "the picture will fall just beyond the sofa. I know the angle."

It must not be forgotten that Oblòmov was in all respects save one entirely excellent : he had a heart of gold, a chaste mind and clear soul : it was just that his will was sapped : Olga, even after her marriage with her really splendid husband, continued to love Oblòmov till the end. It was simply that he had forfeited her respect.

VIII

DOSTOIEVSKY (1821–1881)

QUITE one of the most remarkable things about Dostoievsky is his complete antithesis to Tolstoy in everything. Tolstoy is healthy, Dostoievsky epileptic. Tolstoy's life was strangely uneventful; Dostoievsky was condemned to death after a youth spent in poverty and misery: he endured four years' hard labour, six years in exile; he was for ever on the verge of financial ruin; his wife, his brother and his best friend all died within a very short time of one another; he was attacked and harassed on all sides; he wrote under the very worst possible conditions, starving, ill and pressed for time. Tolstoy was a heretic and a materialist; Dostoievsky was a devout believer in Christianity; and a mystic. Tolstoy was narrow, while Dostoievsky was one of the most broad-minded men who ever lived. Tolstoy hated the supernatural. Dostoievsky lived as Blake did among the unknown, and seemed to regard this world only as fantastic and unreal. Tolstoy was eaten up with pride; Dostoievsky preached and practised a humility almost Christ-like. Tolstoy hated and did not understand Art; Dostoievsky was superbly Catholic and cosmopolitan in his tastes. Tolstoy was characterised by a magnificent intolerance, Dostoievsky by a sweet reasonableness. Tolstoy dreamt of giving all to the poor, and did nothing, while Dostoievsky shared every moment of his life with the lowest criminals; and finally Tolstoy was purposely autobiographical from start to finish, whereas from Dostoievsky we learn nothing whatever from his books. He was as objective as Shakespeare. He does not care to talk about himself. This does not mean that he does not reveal himself in his books. He does, and Christ-like indeed is the character that emanates as the result . . . but he does not see himself in all his main characters as Tolstoy does. His sufferings did not make him cynical or cruel; once when a gushing young lady accosted him with "Gazing at you I can trace

your suffering," he replied: "What suffering?" He drew but little on his personal experiences. He was passionately Slavophil, and therefore opposed in that to Turgenev, whose genius none the less he perceived and revered.

He was the son of a staff-surgeon and a tradesman's daughter, born in a charity hospital at Moscow, brought up in the direst penury. He was, like Goldsmith, quite thriftless, and unable to realise the value of money. Of a confiding nature and withal kindly, he was at the mercy of all those who found it worth while to take advantage of him. Tolstoy, as you will remember, was thrifty and domestic, while Dostoievsky was profuse and a houseless vagabond. Yet another point of divergence. Tolstoy thinks that he hates money, but money loves him. Dostoievsky thinks that he loves money, and money flees from him. As Merejkòvski so neatly puts it, all worldly advantages in Tolstoy are centripetal, in Dostoievsky centrifugal. Tolstoy was careful in spite of the apparent passionateness of his impulses never to overstep the mark; Dostoievsky was for ever giving rein to irregularities and vices: Middleton Murry suggests that he gave way to these on purpose to show his oneness with man in a world to which he could never accustom himself. His first novel, *Poor Folk*, was a prodigious success, which made the failure of the second, *The Double*, all the more terrible to him. From this time his literary career became a life-long and desperate struggle to re-establish himself in the good graces of his fellow-countrymen. Having allied himself about this time with the Petrachevsky circle of socialists and Slavophils, he was one evening led to declaim Pushkin's *Ode on the Abolition of Serfdom*, and in the discussion that followed is said to have declared that if reform could only come through insurrection, "Then insurrection let it be." This was enough to lead to his arrest, and on 22nd December 1849 he was taken with twenty-one others to the scaffold to be executed. All the prisoners were stripped to their shirts in twenty-one degrees of frost and the death sentence was read out. They were then bound in threes to stakes and prepared themselves for death. Suddenly they were unbound and informed that the Tsar had commuted the penalty of death to that of hard labour. But the strain had been too much. From this moment Dostoievsky

looks back on a world that he had so nearly left that he could never quite believe that he belonged to it. His four years in Siberia is turned to magnificent use, as we see in *The House of The Dead*, where we see criminals behave exactly as English Public School boys: we never regard them as miscreants, always as unfortunate victims of adverse circumstances. After these terrible times were over he served for three years as a private soldier and was promoted to be an officer. He turned his back on Socialism because of its materialism and atheistic tendency. He had only joined this section of the community because his nature ever made him seek out what was most difficult, disastrous, hard and terrible. During his imprisonment his epilepsy became more pronounced and his fits recurred with alarming frequency. But there was something lofty and jubilant, a sort of religious revelation which he experienced when the sacred sickness was on him that coloured all the rest of his life.

Then suddenly it was as if something had been rent asunder before him, an unwonted inward light dawned upon his soul, he says in one of his descriptions. Again we are led to a comparison with Tolstoy, for whom with his superb animal vitality the light of death is thrown on life from without, whereas for Dostoievsky the revealing light comes from within. Life and death are one to him; to Tolstoy they are in eternal antagonism.

The former with the eyes of the spirit world looks on life from a footing which to those who live seems death, while the latter looks at death from within the house of life with the eyes of this world.

From his earliest youth Dostoievsky was an omnivorous reader, revelling in and appreciating not only Homer, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Schiller and Hoffmann, but also all the great French classics of the seventeenth century: throughout his life he kept alive his passion for universal culture. He is at once that most curious anomaly, the most Russian of the Russians, and yet the greatest cosmopolitan, and herein once more shows his complete difference from Tolstoy, who, trying to become cosmopolitan, ended by living more completely limited by place and time and nationality than almost any other writer we know. The enthusiasm for the distant simply did not exist for him:

every fibre and root in him is fixed in the present. He visited Italy and brought therefrom no impressions. He is unable to appreciate either Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Wagner or Beethoven. He even comes to regard all his own work as bad art, with the exception of two tales which are easily his weakest. He was never a man of letters as Dostoievsky was. All his life he was ashamed of literature, while Dostoievsky loved it. He was proud of his calling and counted it high and sacred, though he valued his creations in terms of cash.

"Many a time," he writes, "the beginning of a chapter of a novel was already at the printer's and being set up while the end was still in my brain and had to be ready without fail next day. Work out of sheer want has crushed and eaten me up."

He complains that Turgenev, who has two thousand serfs, gets a hundred and fifty pounds, while he, needy as he was, got only thirty-eight pounds. "Poverty forces me to hurry, and so, of course, spoils my work." Endless rows of figures and accounts, interspersed with desperate entreaties for help, fill all his letters.

He edited a paper, the *Vremya*, which met with some success and promised a regular income. Without warning the periodical was prohibited by the censor for publishing a quite harmless article on Poland. Undaunted, he started another venture, the *Epocha*, which incurred the wrath not only of the Government but also of the Liberal party. It was at this time that his brother Michael, his dearest friend Grigoviev, and his first wife, Maria, all died.

"And here I am left all alone," he writes, "and I feel simply broken. I have, literally, nothing left to live for." The *Epocha* failed, its editor became temporarily insolvent, having debts amounting to one thousand four hundred pounds in bills and seven hundred pounds in debts of honour. He starts feverishly on a novel to begin to pay the load off. In the end, to avoid the debtors' prison, he is forced to fly the country. He spent four years of incredible extremes of want abroad, pawning even his "last linen" to keep going.

"They expect literature of me now," he moans. "Why, how can I write at all? I walk about and tear my hair

and cannot sleep of nights. They point to Turgenev and Goncharov. Let them see the state in which I have to work."

And yet in spite of all this he takes a pride in his work, recasting cherished chapters again and again, burning what failed to satisfy him, starting afresh times without number. His attacks were in the meantime on the increase and he worked with ever greater difficulty. In spite of all he never lost heart. It is impossible to imagine circumstances which would have crushed him.

"I can bear everything, any suffering, if I can only keep on saying to myself, 'I live: I am in a thousand torments, but I live. I am on the pillar, but I exist. I see the sun, or I do not see the sun, but I know that it is. And to know that there *is* a sun, that is life enough.'"

And it is at this time (1865-1869), misunderstood by his readers, harassed by creditors, overwhelmed by the deaths of his nearest and dearest, in solitude, poverty and sickness, that he wrote *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Possessed*, and even planned *The Brothers Karamazov*.

He was not merely a man of letters, he is a true hero of literature, as heroic as any warrior or martyr. He fathomed the most dangerous and criminal depths of the human heart, especially the passion of love in all its manifestations. At one end of his gamut he touches the highest, most spiritual passion bordering on religious enthusiasm in Alyosha Karamazov, at the other that of the evil insect, "the she-spider who devours her own mate," in Smerdyakov, Ivan, Dmitri, Fedor.

At times he descends to depths which can only be accounted for as autobiographical fragments. As he himself confesses:

"At times I suddenly plunged into a sombre, subterranean, despicable debauchery. My squalid passions were keen, glowing with morbid irritability. I felt an unwholesome thirst for violent moral contrasts, and so I demeaned myself to animality. I indulged in it by night, secretly, fearfully, foully, with a shame that never left me, even at the most degrading moments. I carried in my soul the love of secretiveness: I was terribly afraid that I should be seen, met, recognised."

Sexual passion appears with him at times a cruel, coarse, even animal force, but never unnatural or perverted.

To Tolstoy the greatest of human sins is the infringement of conjugal fidelity. On the other hand, we hear self-condemnation on the lips of Dostoievsky in the words, "Live decently I cannot."

He gave way to the vice of gambling, and begs for loans with as much absence of self-respect as his own creation, Marmelador. Tolstoy, who also lost heavily at the tables, is able to pull himself up sharp, give up playing and live with the greatest frugality on sixteen shillings a month. He never lost his sense of proportion. Dostoievsky never had any.

"'Everywhere and in everything I go to extremes: all my life I have overshot the mark."

The life of Tolstoy was a pure and virgin water of a spring, that of Dostoievsky is the upgush of fire from elemental depths, mixed with lava, ashes, smoke and sulphur.

When his child dies, Dostoievsky, utterly self-forgetting, loves the child of his flesh, not according to the flesh, but the spirit, as a separate, eternal, irreplacable personality.

"But where is Sonia? I want Sonia."

On 26th January 1881 he died, leaving it to future generations to understand and appreciate the greatness of his genius. And what is the message that he leaves for us to pick up?

"'Love all God's creation—every grain of sand,'" says Zossima, "'every leaf, every ray of God, you should love. Love animals, love plants, love everything. Love everything, and you will arrive at God's secret in things.'"

Every one of his characters shows the conflict of heroic will: he concentrates all the artistic powers of his delineation into his dialogues. which are as fine as Tolstoy's are feeble. All Tolstoy's characters talk so alike that if we did not know who was speaking we should not be able to distinguish them at all by the language, whereas as soon as the first words are uttered in a novel of Dostoievsky we realise at once who it is that is talking. Hence Dostoievsky has no need to describe the appearance of his characters, for by their peculiar form of language and tones of voices they lay themselves bare before us. With Tolstoy we hear because we see; with Dostoievsky we see because we hear.

Then, too, we lose all sense of time in Dostoievsky: in the events of a single day he can make us feel that we have lived through æons.

Added to this is the strange ethereal quality that marks out his characters from the normal. In Tolstoy we feel that the air is rare; we cannot breathe; it is the stage of calm before the storm: in Dostoievsky we feel the reviving freshness and the freedom of the storm itself.

Of one of Tolstoy's characters we read that "she does not condescend to be clever." Tolstoy seems himself to overlook the existence of the human mind altogether: Dostoievsky is pre-eminently a master of the mental rapier of feeling; he may lack many valuable qualities, but one never doubts his intelligence; all his characters are clever men first and foremost. Dostoievsky shows us how, contrary to popular opinion, abstract thought may be passionate: all passions and misdeeds in his work are the natural outcome of dialectic. Life is a tragedy to those who feel. And his characters feel deeply because they think deeply. They suffer endlessly because they deliberate endlessly: they dare to will because they dare to think. And the subject of their thought? In the main, God. They are all "God-tortured." This insatiable religious thirst is one of the most remarkable traits of the Russian spirit: when two or more Russians meet they immediately begin to discuss the immortality of the soul.

Most uncompromising of the realists, he yet ventures into depths hitherto undreamt of and unplumbed.

He seems to dwell with morbid intensity on hysterical women, sensualists, deformed creatures, idiots . . . there is scarcely a healthy man or woman among his gallery of portraits. In Tolstoy there is scarcely one which does not emanate strength, physical perfection and complete self-control. Of a truth in Dostoievsky by his sickness we are healed. There is a sickness unto life, and this is the sickness that he depicts for us.

"What matter if it be a morbid state?" he writes. "What difference can it make that the tension is abnormal, if the result itself, if the moment of sensation, when remembered and examined in the healthy state, proves to be in the highest degree harmony and beauty; and gives an unheard of and undreamed of feeling of completion, of

balance, of satisfaction, and exultant prayerful fusion with the highest synthesis of life ? "

This is all of a piece with the theory that great pain alone is the final emancipator of the soul. In other words, where Tolstoy has to content himself with the fame of a mere artist, Dostoievsky can look forward to recognition as a prophet.

Another point of divergence presents itself when we try to glean a picture of Moscow or Petrograd from these two writers. In Tolstoy we have only the country, the land, the dark, primitive soul of Russia, whereas in Dostoievsky we actually realise the towns in which he lays his action. And yet of these he draws such a picture that they become strangely fantastic and bizarre.

"I am dreadfully fond of realism in Art," he confessed, "when, so to speak, it is carried to the fantastic. What can be more fantastic and unexpected than reality ? What most people call fantastic is, in my eyes, often the very essence of the real."

This is true not merely of places, but of people. When Svidrigailov seems to be most fantastic, then he becomes most real.

The demon Smerdyakov in *The Brothers Karamazov* pines for solidity, corporal reality, call it what you will. In almost the very words quoted above from Dostoievsky himself the Demon makes his confession.

"'I am dreadfully fond of realism—realism, so to speak, carried to the fantastic. What most people call fantastic to me forms the very essence of the real, and therefore I love your earthly realism. Here with you everything is marked out, here are formulas and geometry, but with us all is a matter of indefinite equations. On earth I become superstitious. I accept all your habits here : I have got to like going to the tradesmen's baths, and I like steaming in company with tradesmen and priests. My dream is to be incarnated, but finally, irrevocably, and therefore in some fat eighteen-stone tradesman's wife, and to believe in all that she believes.' "

As it is, he is in a state of metaphysical ennui—magnificently bored. Eternity may after all be something by no means vast. Say a neglected village Turkish bathroom, with musty cobwebs in all its corners. Dostoievsky is

always trying to probe into the unknown: his Demon really tries to explain his point of view.

"'I swear by all that is holy I wished to join the choir and cry with them all "Hosanna," there already escaped, there already broke from my breast . . .

"'I am very sentimental, you know, and artistically susceptible. But common-sense—my most unfortunate quality—kept me within due limits, and I let the moment pass. For what, I asked myself at the time, what would have resulted after my "Hosanna"? That instant all would have come to a standstill in the world, and no events would have taken place. And so, simply from a sense of duty and my social position, I was forced to suppress in myself the good impulse and stick to villainy. Someone else takes all the honour of doing good to himself, and I am left only the bad for my share. I know, of course, there is a secret there, but they will not reveal it to me at any price, because, forsooth, if I found out the actual facts I should break out into a "Hosanna" and instantly the indispensable minus quantity would vanish. Reason would begin to reign all over the earth, and with it, of course, there would be an end of everything. But as long as this does not happen, as long as the secret is kept, there exist for me two truths, one up yonder, Theris, which is quite unknown to me, and another which is mine. And it is still unknown which will be the purer of the two.'"

Samuel Butler in a note called *An Apology for the Devil* says: "It must be remembered that we have only heard one side of the case. God has written all the books." After reading *The Brothers Karamazov* we may take leave to doubt Butler's aphorism. There are certainly occasions in Dostoievsky's books where the Devil has taken the pen out of the writer's hand and made a distinctly fine case for his side.

That he came nearer than most great thinkers to a solution of the mystery of life which is nearly Christian does not alter the fact that he faced the issue bravely and tried not to square his reason with his beliefs, but to evolve from his reason and experience a sound religion. And what is that religion? Ivan, the embodiment of pure intellect, finds that he cannot accept the world as God has made it. That any innocent child should have to suffer

makes any question of future recompense intolerable. It is not that he does not accept God, he most respectfully hands back his ticket. No reward, calculable or incalculable, can obliterate needless suffering.

Father Zossima, on the other hand, says to Alyosha: "'Life will bring you many misfortunes, but you will be happy on account of them, and you will bless life and cause others to bless it.'" That is the secret of Dostoievsky's greatness. Paradoxical as it may sound, out of the mud and filth, from a world full of the diseased and mad he extracts sweetness and light, good cheer and reasonableness.

In spite of the inferno in which he lived, stricken by poverty, crime and disease, he yet blessed life and caused others to bless it: he loved humanity: his charity was boundless, his good-nature omnipotent. "Be no man's judge: humble love is a terrible power which effects more than violence. Only active love can bring out faith. Love men and be not afraid of their sins, love man in his sin: be cheerful as the children and as the birds."

The Russian thought which shall renew humanity finds its ultimate and perfect expression in Dostoievsky. In spite of incoherence and an amazing formlessness, talk and description so unending that it takes us longer to read them than it actually took the characters to live through the events described . . . in spite of a million petty artistic mistakes we are yet carried off our feet by him; there have, we feel, been greater artists but very few greater men. "It is not before you I am kneeling," says Raskolnikov to Sonia, "but before all the suffering of mankind," and this might be taken as the text of all his work.

> "His friends were exaltations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

IX

TOLSTOY (1828–1910)

TOLSTOY was born in the estate of Yàsnaya Polyàna: after the death of his father in Moscow, where they went when he was nine, the novelist returned to his home and graduated at the University of Petrograd in 1848, and shortly afterwards entered the army, and was stationed in the Caucasus, where he began his literary career. He took part in the Crimean War and afterwards settled in Petrograd, where he grew more and more dissatisfied with existing conditions. In 1862 he married and returned once more to Yàsnaya Polyàna. Here he devoted himself to the education of the peasants and edited an educational paper: soon afterwards he assumed a negative attitude to all progress and wrote many novels. Later he urged men to occupy themselves in manual labour, and in the year of his death left his home to put his theories more completely into practice, but died at a wayside railway station. Everything that Tolstoy wrote is autobiographical, so it is unnecessary to dwell further on the bare facts of his life. Like all Russians, he acts upon impulse; unlike Oblòmov, he is first of all the man of action: he asks himself with unwearying persistence, "What is the purpose of my life?" and his answer is: "The purpose of my life is to understand, and as far as possible to do, the will of that Power which has sent me here, and which actuates my reason and conscience." He seeks goodness rather by the head than the heart; he begins with the understanding. As a novelist he keeps closer to actual life than the others, because he has lived his incidents before he writes about them. He is first and foremost a seeker after God: he abjures literature and art through pride, and thinks that truth is to be found only in working like a peasant: he was unable himself to do this because his wife refused to allow him to. "For ourselves we may do what we like, but for the sake of our children we may not," was her contention.

No man ever more truly exemplified the meaning of Bacon's aphorism that "he that is married hath given hostages to fortune."

He had the pride of Lucifer or Lèrmontov's Demon, and yet he spent his life searching for the ideal humility of Dostoievsky's Myshkin, the pure fool, the divine idiot.

He starts by advocating non-resistance to evil, and ends by passionately resisting it.

From the beginning we find in him a supreme love of himself, a man interested only in Russia, an amazing lack of sympathy with culture, an astonishing want of taste (a lover of Dumas in his youth, he later on pins his faith to George Eliot and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). He was quite ignorant of life owing to his wealth.

But by far the most outstanding characteristic of this genius is his perfect paganism: he is always seeking for the divine in the animal. Like so many great Russians, he changed his whole life at one period of his existence.

In 1879 he explains this in a most illuminating passage:

"Five years ago something very curious began to take place in me: I began to experience at first times of mental vacuity, of cessation of life, as if I did not know how I was to live or what I was to do. These suspensions of life always found expression in the same problem, 'Why am I here?' and then, 'What next?' I had lived and lived, and gone on and on till I had drawn near a precipice: I saw clearly that before me there lay nothing but destruction. With all my might I endeavoured to escape from this life. And suddenly I, a happy man, began to hide my boot-laces, that I might not hang myself between the wardrobes in my room when undressing alone at night; and ceased to take a gun with me out shooting, so as to avoid temptation by these two means of freeing myself of life."

He was saved from this mood by becoming friendly with the labouring classes.

"I lived in this way, that is to say, in communion with the people, for two years; and a change took place in me. What befell me was that the life of our class—the wealthy and cultured—not only became repulsive to me, but lost all significance. All our actions, our judgments, science and art itself, appeared to me in a new light. I realised that it was all self-indulgence, that it was useless to look for

any meaning in it. I hated myself and acknowledged the truth. Now it had all become clear to me."

Here as always he unfolds to us all that he knows about himself.

At one moment self-conscious, good and weak, he controls himself, repents, and cultivates loathing of himself and his vices; at another, unconscious, wicked and violent, he fancies himself a great man, who has discovered for the welfare of all mankind new truths, and with a proud consciousness of his own merit looks down on other mortals. In other words, he is imbued in one mood with self-love, in another with self-hate. It is always self.

Then come those twenty happy years immediately after his marriage, years of complete isolation and happiness, in which he learnt to live according to "the one truth, that you must live in such a way as may be best for you and your family."

In the words of Ecclesiastes: "He undertook great things: he built himself houses, and planted vineyards, he made gardens and groves, and placed in them all manner of fruit trees, he made himself cisterns for the watering of the groves, he got himself men-servants and maid-servants . . . and he became great and rich, and wisdom dwelt with him."

And yet there lies the dread of death lurking always in the dim background. Brave enough when confronted with actual danger, he was yet terrified at the thought of passing into nothingness. The truth as he came now to see it consisted in casting out the desire of lands and money; so he determined to leave his home, his wife, his children, his lands, to give away his six hundred thousand kopecks and become a beggar.

"I shall look," he says, "for my friends among the peasants. No woman can stand to me in the place of a friend. Why do we deceive our wives by pretending to consider them our best friends? For it certainly is not true. Woman is, in all respects, morally man's inferior."

"Nowadays," writes his biographer, "Leo behaves to his wife with a touch of exactingness, reproachfulness, and even displeasure, accusing her of preventing him from giving away his property, and going on bringing up the children in the old way. His wife, for her part, thinks herself in the right, and complains of such conduct on her

husband's side. In her there has involuntarily sprung up a hatred and loathing of his teaching and its consequences. Between them there has even grown up a tone of mutual contradiction, the voicing of their complaints against one another. Giving away one's property to strangers and leaving one's children on the world, when no one else is disposed to do the same, she not only looks on as out of the question, but thinks it her duty as a mother to prevent."

"'Should I not have gone with him,' she cries, 'if I had not had young children? But he has forgotten everything in his doctrines.'"

Then comes the final decision.

"Leo's wife, in order to preserve the property for her children, was prepared to ask the authorities to appoint a committee to manage the property. Not wishing to oppose his wife by force, he began to assume towards his property an attitude of ignoring its existence; renounced his income, proceeded to shut his eyes to what became of it, and ceased to make use of it, except in so far as to go on living under the roof of the house at Yàsnaya Polyàna."

His wife continues to look after his wants and turns a blind eye to his doctrines; she is always ready to help him. Even if he seems ungrateful and says that his wife is no friend of his, she finds comfort in the realisation that he cannot get along without her for a day, and that she has made him what he is. Life becomes one golden holiday: there is an air of infectious jollity pervading the household. He finds sheer animal delight in his physical vigour, and yet . . . and yet. . . . Is he not thinking of himself (as usual) when he writes:

"One refined life, led in moderation and within the bounds of decency, of what is commonly called a virtuous household, one family life, absorbing as many working days as would suffice to maintain thousands of the poor that live in misery hard by, does more to corrupt people than thousands of wild orgies by coarse tradesmen, officers or artisans given to drunkenness or debauchery, who smash mirrors and crockery for sheer fun."

It was at this time that he found out that his books were becoming a source of commercial prosperity to him. At first he refused to listen when there was talk of money in

connection with his books, but the Countess, to secure the future of her children, stood firm.

Tolstoy was, as is well known, remarkable for the few friendships which he formed. The notable exception is, of course, Turgenev, who wrote of him: "His chief fault consists in the absence of spiritual freedom. He is an egotist to the marrow of his bones." Despite his constant asseveration that he always confesses everything, this is the one trait he dare not divulge, even to himself.

Dostoievsky calls him "an ordinary Moscow fop of the upper class," "an empty and chaotic soul," *fainéantise* . . . but he was more, much more than this. As Merejkòvski says, he came very near to solving the supreme mystery, to lifting the veil in the Holy of Holies. . . . In the end despairingly he has to cry: "I am a fallen fledgling lying on my back and crying in the high grass." He finds nothing, no faith, no God, for all his seeking. His path lay in pursuing his ideal through things terrestrial, in carrying on those moments when he rolled in self-admiration in his tub as a naked child, when he felt the fresh touch of the cherry-tree boughs, like a child's kiss, against his face.

In all literature there is no writer equal to Tolstoy in depicting the human body. He is accurate, simple and as short as possible, selecting only the few small unnoticed facial or personal features, and producing them gradually he distributes them over the whole course of the story.

The wife of Prince Andreï in *Peace and War* is for ever recurring to our memory owing to the fact that we are constantly reminded of her short downy upper lip. Prince Andreï's sister, too, is always fixed in our minds owing to her trick of flushing in patches and walking heavily. There are countless instances of this. There is the long thin neck of Verestchagin, the swollen neck of Prince Andreï, the rotundity of Platon Karataev, the little white hand of Napoleon. All these details are impressed upon us with unwearying insistence until we come to realise that this is Tolstoy's peculiar method of unfolding before us the psychology of his characters. He has the gift of insight into the body of his *dramatis personæ*. Think for a moment of Anna Karènina. Trait is added to trait, feature to feature . . . she has red lips, flashing grey eyes, and most noticeable of all, her hands are made to express her more even

than her face. In them lies the whole charm of her person, the union of strength with delicacy.

We learn that she always held herself exceptionally erect, that she has a quick, decisive gait, when she dances she has a distinguishing grace, sureness and lightness of movement. Tolstoy emphasises again and again the roundness of her arms, the unruliness of her curls; the traits are so harmonised that they naturally and involuntarily unite, in the fancy of the reader, into one living, personal whole. We feel how easy and pleasant it is to the author to describe living bodies and their movements, not only of people, but also of animals. Even the Tartar footmen who wait on Levine are said to be broad-hipped, an unnecessary touch which shows us how much this sort of bodily accentuation can be carried to excess.

For there is no doubt that Tolstoy relies on gestures where another writer would have had recourse to words. He uses this convertible connection between the external and the internal with inimitable art and exquisite effect. It is the silent smile of Natasha which decides the fate of Pierre far more effectively than any words.

So peculiar is this gift that it has been said that the nervous susceptibility of people becomes different after reading Tolstoy's works. He notices what has escaped everyone else, and uses his discovery with a subtlety of effect that is startling. Thus it is to him that we are indebted for the simple but none the less surprising fact that a man's smile is reflected not only in his face, but also in the sound of his voice.

Thus Platon Karataev says something to Pierre "in a voice changed by a smile." Tolstoy was the first to notice that horse-hoofs have the queer effect of giving, as it were, a "transparent sound." As we should expect from so "animal-loving" a man, Tolstoy sounds every note in sensation. He is equally able to fathom the sensation of her bared body to a young girl, before going to her first ball, and the feelings of an old woman worn out with child-bearing, and those of a nursing mother who has not yet severed the mysterious connection of her body with that of her child. Even the sensations of animals are familiar to him. Not the least of his gifts to us is that he gave us new bodily sensations. He is the greatest portrayer of the

physico-spiritual region in the natural man: that side of the spirit which most nearly approximates to the flesh. He is a man of the senses, half-pagan, a fraction Christian: in the region of pure thought, where Dostoievsky walked at ease, superbly master, he is totally at a loss. But within the limits of the animal in man he is the supreme artist of the world.

In *War and Peace* Tolstoy meant to give us what is commonly known as an historical novel: on laying it down we feel, not that we have lived in an age long past side by side with Napoleon, or fought at Borodino, but that these characters have been transplanted to our own age, and that he is depicting men and women whom we already know very well. The poverty of his historical colouring is amazing: where he depicts reality, the "natural" man, his language is distinguished by unequalled simplicity, strength and accuracy, but directly he gets on to the subject of abstract psychology he is lost; his very language seems to become helpless. When he leaves the passions of the heart for the passions of the mind he becomes obscure, ungrammatical and false. Compare Irteniev, the hero of *Childhood and Youth*, with Nekhlindov in *Resurrection*. The former is distinct, unforgettable, alive . . . the latter a lifeless abstraction, a dreary megaphone. He cannot create human souls with anything like the success he achieves with human bodies.

We see this best of all in the case of Natasha, in *War and Peace*. She seems at the end of the book to have lost her soul in her body, and become a mere prolific she-animal, living solely for her children and husband. She has become divinely fleshly. "'We may run risks ourselves, but not for our children,'" she remarks to Pierre when he wishes to give away his property, echoing what Tolstoy's own wife said to him on a similar occasion.

Austerlitz, Borodino, the burning of Moscow, Napoleon —all pass forgotten as if written on sand, but Natasha remains, Natasha, the eternal mother, triumphantly waving "swaddling clothes, with a yellow stain instead of a green," the divine animal. The swallowing up of the human individual in the universal is Tolstoy's unvarying theme. Natures wallows up Uncle Yeroshka ("I die and—thegrass grows"), child-bearing absorbs Natasha, sinful, destroying

love swallows up Anna Karènina. She is all compact of love. Her words are poor: Tolstoy is always poor in dialogue. His excellence lies, as may have been guessed, in descriptions. One might almost say that his characters only speak because the mechanical conformation of their mouths admits of it.

What do we know, for instance, of Anna? What does she think about Children, People, Duty, Nature, Art, Life, Death and God? We don't know. But, on the other hand, we do know exactly how her slender fingers taper at the end, what a round, polished neck she has, how her curls flutter on her neck and temples; every expression of her face, every movement of her body we do know.

He probes the human till he reaches the animal, and so, as in the case of Vronsky's mare, Frou-frou, he probes the animal till he reaches the human. He brings the likeness of God to the image of the beast.

There are in Tolstoy's books no heroes, no characters, no personalities . . . and hence there is no tragedy, no catastrophe, no redeeming horror, no redeeming laughter. The principals are all clever, honourable, good, simple, naïve or kindly, yet we never feel at home with them. There is always present that feeling with us that he lacks spiritual liberty, as Turgenev said. It is due entirely to his too great sense of the body, too little sense of the spirit.

X

TCHEHOV (1860–1904)

TCHEHOV is to Russian literature what de Maupassant is to French, but he has none of the ribaldry of the great Frenchman. His stories deal with the middle classes, minor officials and the professional classes. Tolstoy looked upon him as a mere photographer, much in the same way that many Englishmen regard Galsworthy because of his amazing sense of detachment. But Tchehov has one quality not commonly found among photographers, and that is humour. Many of his stories are pathetic, but they are always lit up by a vein of gay drollery which adds to their subtlety and heightens the effect. It must always be remembered that he wrote at a period when Russia was in a peculiar state of stagnation. His work represents the reaction of flatness after a period of literary activity. Hence we are always coming up against words like "ennui," "greyness," and so on. Half the people seemed to have run to seed playing vint.

Turgenev painted the generation before, a generation that strove hard to evolve something out of life; Tchehov portrays a generation which had sunk back into torpor: the disease of Oblòmovism had a firm grip of them.

He was born in South Russia, the son of a serf: luckily he was given a good education, finishing at the University of Moscow, where he studied medicine. During the cholera epidemics of 1892 he volunteered to stand at the head of a medical district, and became acquainted with diverse characters, all of whom stood him in good stead when he took to writing, which he did very early in life. He attracted attention from the first in his volume of short humorous sketches: as his life went on he undertook more and more complicated problems and increased year by year in artistry.

His great success lies in presenting the failures of human life, especially the failure of the educated man in the face of the all-pervading meanness of everyday life.

I will treat first of his dramas.

The Russians, it must be premised, go to the theatre to see what they would see off the stage: they are incurably realistic. They do not take a delight, as we do, in huge catastrophes: they like to see the trivial incidents of ordinary life reproduced with life-like accuracy on the stage.

He wrote in all eleven plays, five of which are serious: the remaining farces need not detain us. He discovered that life can be made interesting and dramatic with indulging in heroics. He is always human, and makes us feel moods and sensations over again which we have often felt before. He seems, in other words, to make his plays out of nothing, without having recourse to action or any extraordinary phenomena.

We are not introduced to men and women stripped of the masks which they wear in ordinary life: his characters behave exactly as they would off the stage, and betray themselves as people do by a phrase, a gesture, the humming of a tune and the smell of a flower.

In *The Seagull* we are introduced to the family of Sorin, whose sister is a famous actress called Arkadina. Preparations have been made for some private theatricals written by Arkadina's son, Constantin. The chief part is to be played by Ina, the young daughter of a neighbour who is in love with Constantin, who is full of ideals about reforming the stage. A well-known writer, Trigorin, a man of about forty, is staying with Sorin at the time.

The play is acted: Arkadina labels it decadent; Constantin gets annoyed. Ina after the performance is introduced to Trigorin. The daughter of an agent who has witnessed the performance (her name is Masha) confesses to a doctor visitor that she is in love with Constantin, and the curtain falls on Act I.

The second Act takes place in the same house. Constantin brings in a dead seagull, and lays it at Ina's feet as a symbol which she fails to understand.

Trigorin in the course of a conversation with her tells her what it feels like to be a famous author.

" 'What is there so wonderful about it? Like a monomaniac, who is always thinking day and night of the moon, I am pursued by the one thought which I cannot get rid of,

I must write, I must write, I must. I have scarcely finished a story when I must write a second, then a third, then a fourth. I write uninterruptedly, I cannot do otherwise. What is there so wonderful and splendid in this, I ask you? It is a cruel life. I get excited with you and all the time I am remembering that an unfinished story is waiting for me. I see a cloud which is like a piano, and I at once think that I must remember to say somewhere in the story that there is a cloud like a piano.

"'When I write it is pleasant, and it is nice to correct proofs: but as soon as the thing is published I cannot bear it, and I already see that it is not at all what I meant, that it is a mistake, that I should not have written it at all, and I am vexed and horribly depressed. The public reads it, and says: "Yes, pretty, full of talent, very nice, but how different from Tolstoy!" or "Yes, a fine thing, but how far behind *Fathers and Sons*: Turgenev is better." And so, until I die, it will always be "pretty and full of talent," never anything more: and when I die my friends as they pass my grave will say: "Here lies Trigorin; he was a good writer, but he did not write so well as Turgenev."'"

This reads like that very rare thing in Tchehov, a confession of the author himself.

However that may be, Ina replies that to her it is none the less a most wonderful gift that he possesses. For her part, for the joy of being an artist she would bear the hate of friends, want and disappointment. Trigorin then notices the seagull and is driven to turn it into copy at once.

"'An idea has occurred to me,'" he says, "'for a short story. On the banks of a lake a young girl lives from her infancy. She loves the lake like a seagull, she is happy and free: unexpectedly a man comes and sees her and out of mere idleness kills her, just like this sea-gull.'"

That is the end of the second Act.

In the third Act Ina has fallen in love with Trigorin. Constantin out of jealousy has tried unsuccessfully to kill himself and challenged Trigorin to a duel, of which he takes no notice. After a quarrel with his mother, which is made up, Constantin is inspired to take up the threads of life again. We now discover that Trigorin has been

and is Arkadina's lover. Ina tells the famous author that she is going to follow him to Moscow and they part on a note of passion. Two years elapse.

In the fourth Act we find that Constantin has become famous: Ina has gone on the stage and failed. She has had a child (which died) by Trigorin: he has returned to Arkadina and deserted Ina, who has been thrown over by her parents too. She enters and tells her story, and Constantin declares that he still loves her in spite of all, but she is still in love with Trigorin. Constantin, hearing this, can bear up no longer, but shoots himself.

Such is the rather grim plot: the characterisation is well-nigh faultless, especially of Arkadina, the loving mother, who is quite unable to appreciate her son's talents, and of Trigorin, the weak, vain egoist, who is without a vestige of ill-nature or malice.

The Cherry Garden was his last play and sounds a note of hopefulness which re-echoes through all his stories. Though the present may be black and bitter, Tchehov always looks to a future where ideals shall once more reign.

In the first Act we see the return of a lady who is heavily burdened with debts to her estate in South Russia. It is the month of May and the cherry orchard is in full blossom. We get the exact atmosphere of the arrival of people from a journey and the return of a family to a home from which it has long been absent.

The lady, Ranievskaia, is a child in financial matters and, Micawber-like, imagines that someone or something will turn up to extricate her out of her difficulties. A merchant neighbour of singular astuteness propounds a solution. If they cut down the cherry-trees and let the land for villa holdings they will ensure an income of two thousand five hundred pounds a year at least. They regard this idea as quite out of the question. They refuse to listen to such a ridiculous suggestion. They revert to their Micawber-like attitude and wait for an aunt to die and leave them a legacy and something of a like nature.

In the third Act we arrive at the day of the auction when their house and property are to be sold over their heads. Nevertheless they are holding a dance in spite of

it. The merchant enters and announces that he has bought the cherry orchard.

In the last Act we see them leaving their house for ever; the trees are already being cut down and the house is going to make room for neat suburban villas. The pathos and naturalness of this Act are extraordinary. Every character in the play lives. It is historical and at the same time symbolical, because it shows us why the landed gentry in Russia has ceased to have any importance and how these unpractical, amiable people must go under when faced by energetic, rich, self-made men. The play seems to be about nothing and yet every casual remark has always a definite purpose.

Three Sisters represents the intense monotony of provincial life, relieved momentarily by a passing flash, and then rendered doubly grey by the disappearance of the flash. A regiment of artillery comes to the garrison of a small town. One of the three sisters, Masha, has married a schoolmaster: the two others, Irina and Olga, are living with their brother, who is a professor. Irina is in the telegraph office, Olga teaches. They live for one thing only, to get away and settle in Moscow. They only remain on Masha's account. Masha's husband is an exceedingly tedious schoolmaster, who is always reciting tags of Latin. Once his wife thought him the cleverest man in the world, now she thinks of him as the kindest but most tedious.

When the play begins we hear of a new commander appointed to the battery. His name is Vershinin and he is married to a half-mad woman. Other officers are Baron Tuzenbach and Major Soleny. The former is in love with Irina, who is willing to marry him but does not love him. Masha falls passionately in love with Vershinin. The Major is jealous of Tuzenbach. Suddenly the battery is transferred to some remote corner of the country. Soleny challenges the Baron and kills him. The three sisters are left alone, Vershinin bidding a passionate farewell to Masha, who does not even trouble to hide her grief from her husband. He in a most pathetic way tries to console her: Ina does not care even when she is told of the death of the Baron . . . and so the sisters are left to go on working in their misery, deprived even of the flash which promised to lend some colour to their existence.

It is, of course, impossible to deny that these plays are laden with gloom, but it is the darkness of the last hour before the dawn. Tchehov never despairs : he has an invincible trust in the coming day. He shows us how difficult life is, that there is nothing to be done but to continue working as cheerfully as we may, but in doing so he fulfilled the first condition of all great writing : he never failed to interest, and consequently his plays are, in spite of their sombreness, a never-failing fount of inspiration and æsthetic delight.

As a short story-writer he has certainly no equal in Russia and few in any other country.

Owing to the indefatigability of Mrs Constance Garnett we now possess eight volumes, all containing priceless cameos of Russian life, ranging through the humorous, the bizarre, the mystic, the unconventional and lawless to the pathetic, poignant and dramatic.

He is unflinching in his realism, but passionately devoted to his search for truth and full of a poet's sensitiveness to beauty. He is softer, warmer, altogether kindlier than Maupassant. Even the odious characters are seen through the eyes of a kindly creator who never descends to hardness or bitterness. Indeed this faculty of refraining from judging others is almost the most peculiar feature of Russian writers taken as a whole. They are many degrees nearer the Kingdom of Heaven than any other Christian country, if this virtue is really so valuable as the New Testament insists. There is nothing cynical in Tchehov's melancholy. He accepts the world with all its glaring, tangled skein of inconsequences and wickedness and foolishness and humorously transcribes what he sees in a mood of cool, scientific passivity blending with the sensibility of a sweet, wholesome, responsive nature. Unlike Dostoievsky, he seldom identifies himself with his unfortunate characters.

The first story in the series edited by Mrs Garnett is *The Darling*, which treats of a woman who shares her first husband's anxiety about his theatre; throws herself into the interests of the timber trade in which her second husband works; under the influence of her third begins to regard the campaign against the foot and mouth disease as the most important matter in the world and is finally

left engrossed in grammatical questions and the interests of the little schoolboy in the big cap.

She devotes herself with her whole being in each case to the man and the cause he represents. And Tolstoy in his criticism thinks that Tchehov set out to scoff at her inconstancy. Yet do we laugh at Dryden's frequent change of front? Is it not a sign of life and growth to throw oneself heart and soul into whatever pursuit may be immediately to one's hand? Certainly she loves absurd people, but love is sacred whatever the object of the affection. "He, like Balaam," says Tolstoy, "intended to curse, but the god of poetry forbade him, and commanded him to bless. And he did bless, and unconsciously clothed this sweet creature in such an exquisite radiance that she will always remain a type of what a woman can be in order to be happy herself, and to make the happiness of those with whom destiny throws her."

But I do not feel convinced in my mind that Tchehov meant Olenka to excite our disgust or careless laughter. Where she loves there she loves whole-heartedly: her life is a blank, ready to take any impress, nor does she seek to erase any one of them until it is irrevocably removed from her. There are innumerable little touches deftly sketched in which make us feel not the ridiculousness or emptiness of the Darling, but rather love her for her sensibility and power of loving.

The main attraction of Tchehov for normal English readers is the shrewd psychology and the quick lightning flashes of nimble wit with which the text is strewn. As with his plays, so in his tales there is practically no plot. Passions spin the plot and mere catastrophic incident is not required.

In *Ariadne*, for instance, we are more intrigued by the conversations about women in general (a favourite topic of conversation among the Russians) than by the events that take place. Listen, for instance, to this point of view:

"We want the creatures who bear us and our children to be superior to us and to everything in the world. But the trouble is that when we have been married for some two or three years, we begin to feel deceived and disillusioned: we pair off with others, and again—disappointment, again—reputation, and in the long run we become

convinced that women are lying, trivial, fussy, unfair, undeveloped, cruel—in fact, far from being superior, are immeasurably inferior to us men."

There are moments, too, when we could find it in our hearts to wish that Tchehov had given rein to his obvious gifts for scenic description: so many writers indulge in an orgy of nature panegyrics that we rarely want more from any man, and Tchehov very wisely subordinates everything to his main theme, but all the same we could well do with more of this sort of thing:

"Our homestead is on the high bank of a rapid stream, where the water chatters noisily day and night: imagine a big old garden, neat flower-beds, bee-hives, a kitchen garden, and below it a river with leafy willows, which, when there is a heavy dew on them, have a lustreless look as though they had turned grey: and on the other side a meadow, and beyond the meadow on the upland a terrible, dark pine forest. In that forest delicious reddish agarics grow in endless profusion, and elks still live in its deepest recesses. When I am nailed up in my coffin I believe I shall still dream of those early mornings, you know, when the sun hurts your eyes: or the wonderful spring evenings when the nightingales and the landrails call in the garden and beyond the garden, and sounds of the harmonica float across from the village, while they play the piano indoors and the stream babbles . . . when there is such music, in fact, that one wants at the same time to cry and to sing aloud."

But it is for little character sketches like this of Lubkov, who "would sometimes stand still before some magnificent landscape and say: 'It would be nice to have tea here,'" that endears Tchehov to us so conclusively.

It is certainly sound psychology and good for a young lover to learn by heart (it would save endless heartaches and a thousand other natural shocks the flesh is heir to if they did) this aphorism: "A woman will forgive you audacity and insolence, but she will never forgive your reasonableness."

It is with more than a thrill of delight that we read of so exquisitely apt a simile as that for the girl who had refused a wealthy but utterly insignificant prince and then immediately fretted at her decision. "Just as a peasant pouts with repulsion at a mug of krass with cockroaches

in it but yet drinks it, so she frowned disdainfully at the recollection of the prince."

The story from which these extracts are taken is an amazingly true psychological study of a girl whose coldness only made her more sensual: she lived solely for the purpose of attracting men, was deceitful when deceit was unnecessary, able to appear cultured in society and yet be in reality superstitious, bigoted, illiterate and devoid of all taste.

"'She is half a human beast already,'" says the misogynist, who had given up everything to please Ariadne, speaking of educated women generally. "'Thanks to her, a great deal of what had been won by human genius has been lost again: the woman gradually disappears and in her place is the primitive female . . . of course a woman's a woman and a man's a man, but can all that be as simple in our day as it was before the Flood, and can it be that I, a cultivated man endowed with a complex spiritual organisation, ought to explain the intense attraction I feel towards a woman simply by the fact that her bodily formation is different from mine? To get on terms with a woman is easy enough,'" he concludes. "'You have only to undress her: but afterwards what a bore it is, what a silly business.'"

And now by way of a change let me just lightly give the plots of the following few stories. In *Polinka* we are simply invited to listen to the conversation over the counter of a little milliner and a draper's assistant who loves her and objects to her being led astray by a young medical student. The poignancy of the tale lies in the fact that the conversation, which is quite tragic, has to take place in public and therefore covered by discussions about buttons and corsets.

Anynta describes the misery of a kept mistress of a medical student who is tired of her.

The Two Volodyas shows us a girl who has married one elderly Volodya pining for the affection of another Volodya, who treats her as a child who has to be humoured. He told her that she was like a little dog waiting for a bit of ham to be thrown to it. Then he sat her on his knee, and dancing her up and down like a child, hummed: "Tara-ra-boom-dee-ay . . . tara-ra-boom-dee-ay."

The Trousseau gives us a pathetic picture of a wife and daughter in some dull, out-the-way place preparing year in, year out, material for her "bottom drawer," the girl after all dying before she met anyone who wanted to marry her.

The Help-Mate describes the doings of a suspicious husband who finds that his wife is corresponding secretly: he offers to set his wife free in order that she may marry her lover. We hear of a mother-in-law who aids her daughter in her immorality delightfully touched in in a phrase that cuts like a lash: "A stout lady with small predatory features like a weasel, who loved her daughter to distraction and helped her in everything: if her daughter were strangling someone the mother would not have protested but would only have screened her with her skirts."

The wife refuses to accept a divorce because it will lower her status and perhaps her lover will throw her over. He is younger than she is.

In *An Artist's Story* we get some invaluable hints on the problem of the education of the masses.

"'The whole horror of their position,'" says the artist, "'lies in their never having time to think of their souls, of their image and resemblance. Cold, hunger, animal terror, a burden of toil, like avalanches of snow, block for them every way to spiritual activity—that is, to what distinguishes man from the brutes and what is the only thing which makes life worth living—the people must be freed from hard physical labour: we must lighten their yoke, let them have time to breathe, that they may not spend all their lives at the stove, at the wash-tub, and in the fields, but may also have time to think of God—may have time to develop their spiritual capacities. The highest vocation of man is spiritual activity, the perpetual search for truth and the meaning of life. Make coarse animal labour unnecessary for them, let them feel themselves free, and then you will see what a mockery these dispensaries and books are. Once a man recognises his true vocation, he can only be satisfied by religion, science, and art, and not by these trifles. Take upon yourself a share of their labour. If all of us, townspeople and country people, all without exception, would agree to divide between us the labour which mankind spends on the satisfaction of their

physical needs, each of us would perhaps need to work only for two or three hours a day. What is needed is not elementary education, but freedom for a wide development of spiritual capacities. If one must cure, it should not be diseases, but the causes of them. Remove the principal cause—physical labour—and then there will be no disease. We have plenty of doctors, chemists, lawyers, plenty of people can read and write, but we are quite without biologists, mathematicians, philosophers, poets. The whole of our intelligence, the whole of our spiritual energy, is spent on satisfying temporary, passing needs.'"

The story itself, however, concerns the love of an artist for a girl who disobeys the dictates of her heart and gives up her happiness at her sister's behest without question. The passage where the artist hears that his chance of real abiding love has been snatched from him is peculiarly Tchehov-like at his most poignant. He goes, full of hope and ecstasy, to meet his beloved and hears her sister, who dislikes him, giving a dictation lesson.

"'God . . . sent . . . a crow,'" she said in a loud, emphatic voice, probably dictating. . . . "'God sent a crow a piece of cheese. . . . A crow . . . a piece of cheese . . . Who's there?' she called suddenly, hearing my steps.

"'It's I.'

"'Ah! Excuse me. I cannot come out to you this minute: I'm giving Dasha her lesson.'

"'Is Ekaterina Pavlovna in the garden?'

"'No, she went away with my sister this morning to our aunt in the province of Penza. And in the winter they will probably go abroad,' she added after a pause. 'God sent . . . the crow . . . a piece . . . of cheese. . . . Have you written it?'

"I went into the hall and stared vacantly at the pond and the village, and the sound reached me of 'A piece of cheese . . . God sent the crow a piece of cheese.'"

In *Three Years*, a somewhat longer tale, we read of the gradually waning affection between husband and wife and their reconciliation.

Very deftly does the author show us the difference between the passion which Laptev felt for Yulia at the beginning and his feeling at the end when she tells him how

dear he is to her: though he kept smiling at her and her beautiful neck with a sort of joyous shyness as a sign of the new birth of his love, yet we read that when she put her arm round his neck he cautiously removed her hand. The mingled emotions are exquisitely rendered.

His longest story is *The Duel* and in it we hear of a neurasthenic, Laevsky, who finds that "'living with a woman who has read Spencer and followed you to the ends of the earth is no more interesting than living with any Anfissa or Kulina. There's the same smell of ironing, of powder, and of medicines, the same curl-papers every morning, the same self-deception.'" He tries every means in his power to raise money by loan to leave the Caucasus and his mistress: there is a clear-headed, cold-blooded zoologist called Von Koren who despises Laevsky for his degeneracy. He thus analyses Laevsky's character:

"'His existence is confined like an egg within its shell. Whether he walks or sits, is angry, writes, rejoices, it may all be reduced to wine, cards, slippers and women. He has had great success with women and therein lies his noxiousness. He is a failure, a superfluous man, a victim of the age.'" Meanwhile Laevsky's mistress had been philandering with other men. He discovers her infidelity just when he is on the point of fighting a duel with Von Koren. He was wounded but slightly and became reconciled to his wife, while Von Koren was the one to go away, leaving lover and mistress almost happy in each other's society.

Mire is a horrible story about two men neither of whom was able to resist the fascinations of a Jewess prostitute.

Neighbours is an account of a visit paid by a brother to his sister who had run away with a married man: his first intention is to wreak his vengeance on her lover for the dishonour he had brought upon his house, but he remains as their friend.

At Home gives us a picture of the dull monotony of life in the country: a girl returns to her aunt's house and out of sheer boredom is induced to marry the local doctor.

Expensive Lessons shows the unrequited passion of a research student for a poor French governess whom he had hired to teach him French.

The Princess tells of a rich girl who likes to see others happy and revels in the thought that she is the means of

making many content who otherwise would not be. She is taken severely to task by a doctor who tries to show her her true character as seen by her inferiors. "'You look upon the mass of mankind from the Napoleonic standpoint as food for the cannon. But Napoleon had at least some idea: you have nothing except aversion: your philanthropic work has been a farce from the beginning. There was nothing but the desire to amuse yourself with living puppets.'" He says too much, is frightened and apologises, and the Princess goes from him once more reinstated to her former position of Lady Bountiful in her own mind. "'How happy I am!'" she murmured, shutting her eyes. "'How happy I am!'"

The Chemist's Wife is a charming trifle dealing with a country town in which an officer and a doctor knock up a chemist late at night on the pretext of wanting some peppermints, in reality to talk to the pretty young wife of the chemist. She is flattered: adventure has at last come her way: she stays some time downstairs talking to them while her husband sleeps. Reluctantly her visitors leave her, and when she is once more in bed return, this time waking her husband, who attends to them himself.

"Two minutes later the chemist's wife saw Obvyosov go out of the shop, and after he had gone some steps she saw him throw the packet of peppermints on the dusty road. The doctor came from behind a corner to meet him . . . they met, and gesticulating, vanished in the morning mist."

"'How unhappy I am!'" said the chemist's wife, looking angrily at her husband, who was undressing quickly to get into bed again. "'Oh, how unhappy I am!'" she repeated. "'And nobody knows, nobody knows.'

"'I forgot fourpence on the counter,'" muttered the chemist, pulling the quilt over him. "Put it away in the till, please. . . .'" And at once he fell asleep again.

In *The Lady with the Dog* we get one of those notes of optimism which are so characteristic of Tchehov just where the normal writer would be pessimistic.

"The monotonous hollow sound of the sea, rising up from below, spoke of the peace, of the eternal sleep awaiting us: in this constancy, in this complete indifference to

the life and death of each of us, there lies hid, perhaps, a pledge of our eternal salvation, of the unceasing movement of life upon earth, of unceasing progress towards perfection."

The story is about a married man who conceives a violent passion for a married woman whom he meets while on holiday.

"Anna and he loved each other like people very close and akin, like husband and wife, like tender friends: it seemed to them that fate itself had meant them for one another, and they could not understand why he had a wife and she a husband: and it was as though they were a pair of birds of passage, caught and forced to live in different cages. They forgave each other for what they were ashamed of in their past, they forgave everything in the present, and felt that this love of theirs had changed them both."

By far the greater number of Tchehov's tales deal with the illicit loves of married women: young girls are compelled to marry husbands who are distasteful to them, and in after years they revenge themselves by giving themselves to sprucer, cleaner, stronger men who flit into and out of their lives only too quickly.

In *A Doctor's Visit* Tchehov harks back again to a subject which is always dear to him, the uselessness of modern labour. In this case two thousand workpeople work without rest in unhealthy surroundings making bad cotton goods . . . for what purpose? The factory owner's family are unhappy: "the only one who enjoys her life is Christina Dmitryevna, the governess, a stupid, middle-aged maiden lady in pince-nez. All these five blocks of buildings are at work, and inferior cotton is sold in the Eastern markets, simply that Christina Dmitryevna may eat sterlet and drink Madeira."

The doctor who is called in to attend the daughter of the house ventures on a criticism of present-day life.

"'Our generation sleep badly, are restless, talk a great deal, and are always trying to settle whether we are right or not. For our children or grandchildren that question will have been settled. Things will be clearer for them than for us. Life will be good in fifty years' time.'"

Ionitch shows us Tchehov in another characteristic vein.

Here he indulges in one of his favourite tricks, that of divulging the foolishness of his *dramatis personæ* through their idiotic conversation. Ivan Petrovitch is an irritating buffoon whose idea of wit is to repeat *ad nauseam* phrases like "How do you do, if you please?" and "Not badsome."

Tchehov's sense of irony is well shown in the following passage which occurs in this story:—

"Then they all sat down in the drawing-room with very serious faces and Vera Iosiforna read her novel. It began like this: 'The frost was intense . . .' The windows were wide open; from the kitchen came the clatter of knives and the smell of fried onions. . . . It was comfortable in the soft deep arm-chair: the lights had such a friendly twinkle in the twilight of the drawing-room, and at the moment on a summer evening when sounds of voices and laughter floated in from the street and whiffs of lilac from the yard, it was difficult to grasp that the frost was intense, and that the setting sun was lighting with its chilly rays a solitary wayfarer on the snowy plain. Vera read how a beautiful young countess founded a school, a hospital, a library, in her village, and fell in love with a wandering artist: she read of what never happens in real life, and yet it was pleasant to listen . . . it was comfortable, and such agreeable, serene thoughts kept coming into the mind one had no desire to get up.

"'Not badsome?' . . . Ivan said softly."

"Hugeous," "Thank you most dumbly," were among the sallies of wit which Ivan hurled at his audience from time to time.

The object of the story is as usual to emphasise the uselessness of the narrow lives of the inhabitants of a provincial town where men and women did absolutely nothing, took no interest in anything and looked askance at anyone who tried to speak intelligently on any topic of importance. There was nothing to do except eat and play vint. Tchehov shows us these people growing older but otherwise changing not at all, dragging down to their level even those who in their youth endeavoured to break loose from the bondage of aimlessness and inertia.

There is, however, a side of Tchehov which one would not expect in so relentless a realist. In *The Black Monk* we cross the border of the unseen and are in the society of

mystics. No writer has so severely handled those who rely on old wives' fables and ignorant superstitions, but in this story he probes far down into the spiritual world and comes into line with Dostoievsky in a field which we are astonished to see him approach.

The phantom that appears periodically to Kovrin and so enhances his happiness may be an hallucination : it is completely in the vein of Smerdyakov and Ivan *The Brothers Karamazov*, though the conclusions are very different.

" 'And what is the object of eternal life ?' " asks Kovrin of the black monk, and the spirit answers : " 'As of all life—enjoyment. True enjoyment lies in knowledge, and eternal life provides innumerable and inexhaustible sources of knowledge, and in that sense it has been said : "In my Father's house there are many mansions." ' "

One of Tchehov's most remarkable traits is his capacity for getting right inside the very body of his characters. In *An Anonymous Story*, with a sureness of touch that we can only wonder at, he paints for us the hardships of a flunkey's life. Just as Turgenev seems to have been able to see into the most secret recesses of a young girl's heart, so Tchehov can put on the guise of an old man or a young boy lover, a jealous wife or an unfaithful husband, a garrulous father or a feckless waster at will, and actually become them for ten, twenty, fifty pages at a time without once giving us a chance to doubt the truth of his creation.

There are moments when we imagine that he leans rather to that side of life which we associate with authorship, hatred of domesticity. So many of his characters fall foul of conjugal relationships, but it is one of his worst characters who says that love is only a simple physical need, like the need for food or clothes, and instances the French workman who spends ten sous on dinner, five sous on wine, five or ten sous on women, and devotes his brain and nerves entirely to his work, and it is surely the voice of Tchehov himself who replies : " 'Your everlasting attacks on female logic, lying, weakness and so on—doesn't it look like a desire at all costs to force woman down into the mud that she may be on the same level as your attitude to her ?' "

There are many places in this long "anonymous story" where Tchehov himself seems to be speaking to us across the footlights. It is his voice again that I hear in Zinaida's "'The meaning of life is to be found only in one thing—fighting. To get one's heel on the vile head of the serpent and to crush it. That's the meaning of life. In that alone or in nothing.'"

In the pseudo-valet's "'One can serve an idea in more than one calling. If one has made a mistake and lost faith in one, one may find another." And once more in "'Man finds his true destiny in nothing if not in self-sacrificing love for his neighbour.'" And lastly in the same man's "'All I ask for is an objective attitude to life: the more objective, the less danger of falling into error. One must look into the root of things and try to see in every phenomenon a cause of all the other causes. We have grown feeble, slack—degraded, in fact. Our generation is entirely composed of neurasthenics and whimperers: we do nothing but talk of fatigue and exhaustion. Life is only given us once and one wants to live it boldly, with full consciousness and beauty. One wants to play a striking, independent, noble part: one wants to make history so that those generations may not have the right to say of each of us that we were nonentities or worse. . . . Why should my ego be lost?'"

But if I had to select one characteristic story of Tchehov's to illustrate his method more perfectly than any other I should choose *The Husband.* It is simply on account of a tax-collector and his wife going to a dance held in honour of the coming of a regiment to the town. The wife under the influence of the music, the drink and the unaccustomed society begins to revel in the function: her husband immediately orders her to return home, merely to satisfy a whim.

The final paragraphs of the story, in which we see the wretched couple walking home in the dark, the mud slushing under their feet, choking with hatred of each other, are inimitable.

The fourth volume of tales is called *The Party*, and contains a wonderful story called *Terror*, in which we again get Tchehov's favourite plot of a man making love to his friend's wife.

The terror lies in the fact that the man loves his wife while she is indifferent to him and gives herself to her husband's friend, who leaves her as soon as he has won her.

In *A Woman's Kingdom* he reverts to machinery and capital, and in passing introduces a very sound criticism of Maupassant's work.

The Kiss, which is just the story of an officer being kissed in the dark in mistake for somebody else, is a supreme example of Tchehov's genius in making a completely successful story out of the merest trifle.

The Teacher of Literature is a man who chafes, as so many of Tchehov's heroes do, at the littleness of life. "I am surrounded," he writes in his diary, "by vulgarity, and vulgarity. Wearisome, insignificant people, pots of sour cream, jugs of milk, cockroaches, stupid women. . . . There is nothing more terrible, mortifying, and distressing than vulgarity. I must escape—I must escape."

In volume five *The Wife* is a poignantly pathetic story of a man who loves his wife desperately but meets with no response to his affection; it differs from other tales of the same sort in that the wife in this case states most plainly and forcibly exactly why they fail to get on.

"'You bring suffocation, oppression,'" she says, "'something insulting and humiliating to the utmost degree. Law and morality are such that a self-respecting healthy young woman has to spend her life in idleness, in depression, and in continual apprehension, and to receive board and lodging from a man she does not love.'"

Difficult People shows us, as Tchehov is fond of doing, a family in the process of bickering and squabbling from day to day.

The Grasshopper is the picture of a married girl who jumps from one lover to another, only realising the purity and greatness of her husband when he dies heroically.

A Dreary Story is the notebook of an old man who is about to die, having achieved fame but not found happiness. In this story there is a magnificent description of the fascination of lecturing.

"'No kind of sport,'" he concludes, "'no kind of game or diversion, has ever given me such enjoyment as lecturing. Only at lectures have I been able to abandon myself entirely to passion, and have understood that inspiration is not an

invention of the poets, but exists in real life, and I imagine Hercules after the most piquant of his exploits felt just such voluptuous exhaustion as I experience after every lecture.'"

We feel again that some autobiographical thread of the author's is creeping in when he makes his old man say: "'I am interested in nothing but science. I still believe that science is the most important, the most splendid, the most essential thing in the life of man: that it always has been and will be the highest manifestation of love, and that only by means of it will man conquer himself and nature.'"

The remaining stories in the volume, which are peculiar in that they are linked by having characters in common, dwell on the evils of Tchehov's days, the listlessness of the educated public, the refusal to break out of the case or the groove, the general hypnotism and blindness to suffering of the so-called happy.

"'There ought to be,'" says the hero in *Gooseberries*, "'behind the door of every happy, contented man someone standing with a hammer continually reminding him with a tap that there are unhappy people.'"

We learn in *About Love* that Tchehov's apprenticeship to medicine "taught me one invaluable lesson as an artist, to individualise each case."

In the sixth and last volume we have *The Witch*, which gives its name to the volume, which is parallel with *The Chemist's Wife* in that it again shows a wife dissatisfied with her husband endeavouring to secure a moment's romance with a postman who has lost his way.

Peasant Wives dwells on the unfaithfulness of women, and in *Agafya* he reverts to the style and plot of *The Witch*.

Gusev is a horrible story of a man dying at sea: when dead his body is sewn up and thrown into the water, where he is eaten by a shark.

In the Ravine is a picture of a girl not very different in her calculated brutality and heartlessness from Regan and Goneril: it is one of the most powerful stories that Tchehov ever wrote.

As a short story-writer Tchehov stands in a unique position. He relies very little on plot, he is interested only in characters: every one of his creations stands out

definitely and clearly, and though he points no moral it is easy to come to quite certain conclusions with regard to his own view on life.

He obviously regards women as frail, easily dissatisfied, just as he looks upon the men of his age as invertebrate, lacking in energy, ideals, or any sense of the nobility of work.

His scenic descriptions are clear-cut and beautiful, not less effective because they are so sparingly used.

He is obviously puzzled by the why and wherefore of existence, and refuses to shut his eyes when he finds himself confronted by uncomfortable truths.

But his main feature is his incurable optimism. He has no very great opinion of the men of his own day, but it is easy to see that he has unbounded faith in the future, and to stigmatise such a writer as "gloomy" only betrays the impotence and wrong-headedness of the critic.

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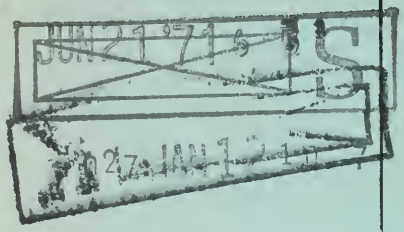

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